

# **A Pedagogy of Embrace**

**A theology of hospitality as a pedagogical  
framework for religious education in  
Church of England schools.**

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## **Abstract**

There is a lack of clarity about the purpose and place of religious education (RE) in Church of England schools. This has led to confusion amongst teachers concerning how RE connects with the mission of the Church of England, and as a result how they teach the subject.

This thesis reports a hermeneutical study which is theological-philosophical in nature. Firstly, it set out to determine whether a theology of hospitality could help teachers in Church of England schools understand the purpose and place of RE. Secondly, it set out to establish a pedagogical framework for RE based on a theology of hospitality. The study used a variety of qualitative methods: analysis of biblical sources relating to hospitality; analysis of conceptual literature relating to a theology of hospitality and education; active contemplations on images; and a focus group study.

The theological-philosophical study found that understanding mission as hospitality provided a way forward for conceptualising the purpose and place of RE in this context. It identified the notion of an embrace as a visual representation for the relationship between RE and the mission of the Church of England. A pedagogical framework for RE was established taking the form of three principles: creating space; encountering others; listening for wisdom. Underpinning the principles was the concept of a lived pedagogy, rooted in being the host-guest.

An empirical study refined and shaped the three principles. It confirmed the use of an embrace not only as an analogy for the relationship between RE and the mission of the Church, but also in understanding the principles for pedagogy.

Finally, I conclude that a pedagogy of embrace provides a way for teachers to fulfil the requirements of the Church of England *Statement of Entitlement* (2016) and the *Church of England Vision for Education* (2016).

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## Introduction

Seven years is a long time in education.

When I started my research, my youngest son had just started primary school, and he has now begun his first year at secondary school. During this time, we have had at least two changes to the National Curriculum, the introduction of a phonics test (my youngest son was one of the first to do this), the removal of levels of attainment, and a new SATS test for Year 6 (my eldest son was one of the first to do the new SPAG test).

Education policy does not stand still.

During the write-up of my thesis a White Paper (Education Excellence Everywhere, 2016) was published, but then a change of Education Secretary led to some of the paper being retracted or changed. Alongside this the Church of England published a new vision for education (2016) which set out its own position within a changing educational landscape where increasing numbers of academies and free schools offer education to our children.

Within this constantly changing educational landscape, I have tried to remain focused on a piece of research which aims to bring clarity to the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools, and in light of this to suggest ways forward for framing pedagogy within a Church of England context. Over the last seven years, there have been many changes within the world of religious education<sup>1</sup>. A non-statutory national framework for RE (QCA, 2004) was revised and published as the RE Review in 2013. This saw a significant move away from the language of learning about and learning from religion. Within the Church of England, a *Statement of Entitlement for RE* was launched in 2011, and was then revised in 2016.

There have also been a number of reports, critical of both the purpose of and pedagogy used in RE in all schools. For example, three Ofsted reports

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on, I generally use the abbreviation 'RE' to refer to religious education, unless there is a specific need to include the term in full, for example, to add clarity or emphasis.

(2007, 2010, 2013), and a Church of England report (Making a Difference? 2014), as well as research and discussion papers about the place and purpose of RE in all schools (for example, REforReal, 2015, A New Settlement? 2015) and in wider society (Living with Difference: Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2016) have had significant publicity in recent years. In late 2016 a Commission on Religious Education was established by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales<sup>2</sup> to review legal, education and policy frameworks relating to RE in order to improve the quality of provision in all schools.

Seven years is a long time in the religious education world.

It is also a long time in terms of my own changing role within the RE community. When I embarked on this research I was working primarily as a Local Authority adviser with community schools with a limited role within the Diocese of Norwich. As my local authority role diminished due to financial constraints within local government, I took up a more prominent role within the Diocese of Norwich and with Culham St Gabriel's Trust. My own sphere of influence has therefore changed, and this has had an impact on the way my research has been shaped and the focus of my research questions. Latterly, I have held conversations at national level with regard to the purpose of RE and curriculum development which means there is a possibility of my research reaching a wider audience.

During these seven years my research has taken me on a journey. I initially set out to explore the relationship between the religious belief of the teacher and pedagogy within a Church of England context. My research question was not fully developed at this stage, and as I undertook my review of pedagogical approaches in RE it became clear that there was a distinct connection between pedagogy (how we teach RE) and purpose (why we teach RE). Alongside my review of pedagogies, I came across a paper by Trevor Cooling (2010) which triggered a question in my mind about whether a theology of hospitality may be used to help understand the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools, and also whether it

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<sup>2</sup> I have included a glossary at the end of the thesis explaining some key terms and brief summary of RE organisations.

might be used to create principles for a pedagogical approach. It was at this point that my initial research question became two questions:

- Can a theology of hospitality help us to understand the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools?
- In light of this understanding, can a theology of hospitality provide a pedagogical framework for RE in Church of England schools?

The understanding of the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools I put forward here will, I hope, help teachers to understand the subject within the wider mission of the Church of England. I then put forward a set of principles for pedagogy which will enable teachers to effectively provide a robust academically critical RE, but within this distinctly Christian context.

The thesis begins with a two-part literature review reflecting the two research questions. In these first two chapters I review the literature relating to RE pedagogies and then that relating to the purpose and place of RE within a Church of England context. At the end of this review I put forward the hypothesis that a Christian theology of hospitality may provide a way of understanding the purpose and place of RE in a Church of England context, and also provide a way of framing pedagogy in RE in Church of England schools. In Chapter Three, I set out my methodology and the methods I used. In Chapters Four and Five, I undertake the theological-philosophical aspects of the enquiry in terms of biblical and conceptual literature analysis. At this point, in Chapter Six I put forward a preliminary proposition in terms of understanding the place and purpose of RE within the Church of England context, and initial ideas in terms of principles for pedagogy. In Chapter Seven, I record the themes and conclusions arising from the focus group discussions about the preliminary proposition. In Chapters Eight and Nine I bring together all the research to present my final proposition in the form of a theoretical framework for teaching RE in Church of England schools; a pedagogy of embrace.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review: Pedagogies in religious education**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Pedagogies used in Church of England schools relating to RE are influenced by a complex set of contextual factors. These factors include varying views about the purpose of RE, many of which are rooted in secular philosophy or psychology, and others which are rooted in a more confessional or faith nurture approach. These have shaped the nature of pedagogy in RE in Church of England schools over the last fifty years. This literature review presents and critiques a range of pedagogies and shows their limitations for Church of England schools.

Before I explain specific factors relating to RE pedagogy, it is worth noting some of the wider contextual factors, changes and influences on pedagogy. According to Baumfield, education policy since the Education Reform Act of 1988 has focused largely on curriculum and assessment rather than pedagogy, with the exception of the literacy and numeracy strategies in England (Baumfield, 2012, p. 206). However, in recent years, the importance of psychology in understanding how pupils learn has developed through the works of, for example, Willingham (2009) and Hattie (2014). Alongside this, there has been an increased emphasis on what is understood by a knowledge-based curriculum (Hirsch, 2016) and which went on to influence government policy under former Secretary of State, Michael Gove (Kueh, 2018, p.61). A focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as one of two aims for education in the National Curriculum from 1988, and more recently the requirement to promote fundamental British values provide a complicated context within which pedagogy has been shaped (Department for Education, 2014). Alongside this religious diversity has increased in the United Kingdom in three ways according to Barnes (2012). These are a growth in the variety of religions that are practiced, greater internal diversity within these religions and an increase in the number of people who hold non-religious worldviews (Barnes, 2012, p. 68).

Within this complex context, the last fifty years have seen the rise of a range of pedagogies for RE which have shaped and changed the nature of the subject from primarily Christian confessionalism (inducting young people into a faith tradition, sometimes called 'faith nurture' or 'faith

formation') to an educational study of religion and belief. A phrase increasingly being used within the RE professional community is enabling pupils to become more 'religiously literate' (for example, Dinham and Shaw, 2015). These changes have reflected the legal framework for RE which I will briefly outline, as this sets a context for the rise of different pedagogical approaches.

Copley (1997) provides a comprehensive overview of the changing legal framework of religious education from the 1940s to the late 1990s. For reasons of brevity I focus on the 1944 Education Act, the 1988 Education Act and the 2010 Academies Act and their impact on the evolution of RE.

Copley shows how the 1944 Education Act retained some of the legal framework from the 1870 Act; for example, the right-to-withdraw clause was retained. The term religious education<sup>3</sup> was first used in a formal educational sense in the 1944 Act, and referred to both the classroom subject (religious instruction) and an act of worship. One important change in the 1944 act was the introduction of locally 'agreed syllabuses'. These syllabuses were to be created by a panel which included members of the Local Education Authority (LEA), the Church of England except in Wales, other denominations and teachers. For the first time, voluntary controlled schools were not allowed to teach religious instruction in a denominational way. Voluntary aided schools retained the right to provide denominational instruction in accordance with their trust deed (Copley, 1997, pp.30-31). The 1944 Act also allowed LEAs to set up a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to advise on methods of teaching and resources for schools. However, by 1952 only 31 out of 163 LEAs had established them (Copley, 1997, p.32). Whilst there was much consensus about the teaching of religion and its place in education there was still a wide variance of views as evidenced in the House of Commons debates (Hansard, 1943). The result of the 1944 Act was that religious instruction as a classroom subject, and collective worship, were understood under the broader banner of religious education. The primary focus was on the teaching of Christianity, although it was to be non-denominational (i.e. not pertaining to a particular denomination such as Anglican or Methodist). The

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<sup>3</sup> Whilst explaining the legal framework I retain 'religious education' in full to ensure clarity.

merging of religious instruction and collective worship as 'religious education' in the 1944 Act was significant, and as I will show in the next chapter has led to confusion which still remains in schools today.

Over forty years later, in 1988, with significant cultural and societal changes taking place, the government legislated to introduce a National Curriculum. By this time, questions were being asked about the place of world religions in the religious instruction curriculum. Agreed syllabuses were reducing in influence as materials from the SHAP working party on World Religions in Education, and Christian Education Movement (CEM) gained popularity (Copley, 1997, pp.121-122). SHAP was specifically set up in 1969 to encourage the teaching of world religions. The 1988 Act is generally viewed as a compromise between different conflicting stakeholders. Copley (1997) argues that Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State for Education and Schools at the time, was primarily concerned with enforcing the status quo for religious education, rather than making radical changes (Copley, 1997, p.136). The 1988 Act separated religious education (no longer referred to as instruction) and collective worship into different activities. After heated and passionate speeches (Copley, 1997, pp.140f) the law stated that new agreed syllabuses must reflect the fact that religious traditions in this country are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions. SACREs became compulsory and were required to review the locally agreed syllabus every five years. RE became part of what was (and still is) known as the 'basic curriculum', which was defined as the National Curriculum and RE. This view of RE was upheld in the 1996 Education Act. Alongside these changes the law reinforced the use of the locally agreed syllabus by voluntary controlled schools; whilst voluntary aided schools were still to meet the requirements of the trust deed of the school usually with the agreement of the diocese.

In 2010, the Academies Act required academies and free schools to teach RE within the requirements of a locally agreed syllabus set out in Education Act 1996 Section 375(3) and paragraph 50 of Schedule 19 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. These requirements were that RE must

reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

(1996 Education Act Section 375(3))

Therefore, with the onset of academies and free schools which are not required to follow an agreed syllabus (whether or not they are voluntary controlled or voluntary aided) many dioceses are creating their own syllabus or have effectively 'adopted' the locally agreed syllabus for all their schools and academies.

The legal context shows that over the last 70 years, the nature of religious education has changed. These changes have both been influenced by and had an influence on the changing approaches to teaching and learning in RE. For example, some pedagogies have grown out of the changes to the legal framework, such as how to effectively teach about world religions. This has had a positive and negative impact. Theory about RE has often been re-active to legal and other changes in education, when perhaps it should have been more pro-active (Grimmitt, 2000, p.11). For example, Kay (2012, p.58) cites the influences of the School's Council on curriculum innovation in education and the focus on a child-centred approach in RE in the 1970s. In addition, philosophies about the purpose of RE changed as RE moved away from its 'faith nurture' approach post-1988. This last point, in my view, is to be welcomed but the use of language around religious education in the legal framework has also led to confusion about the purpose of RE, particularly in Church of England schools, which is explored in Chapter Two.

## **1.2 The approach taken in my literature review**

One of the most comprehensive explanations and descriptions of pedagogical approaches in RE was undertaken by Professor Michael Grimmitt. Grimmitt traced the history of pedagogies and invited exponents of them to explain their theories in a seminal publication which he edited, entitled *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the research and development of good pedagogic practice in RE* (2000). According to Grimmitt, six of the most influential pedagogical approaches have been:

- The Phenomenological approach.
- The Experiential approach.
- The Critical Realist approach.

- The Human Development approach.
- The Interpretive approach.
- The Constructivist approach.

Using Grimmitt's framework of six pedagogical approaches I engaged critically with each of them. In examining some pedagogies, I included examples beyond those in Grimmitt's book because developments had occurred since the book was published in 2000. This was particularly the case in relation to the critical realist, interpretative and constructivist pedagogies. Using a range of books and journals by key academics in the field of RE I commented on the debate surrounding pedagogy in RE and also brought my own analysis of each, particularly in relation to whether they could be applied or were appropriate in Church of England schools.

Before beginning my review, it is important to explain what Grimmitt understood by pedagogy as this is referred to in the subsequent text. Grimmitt makes a distinction between pedagogical principles and pedagogical procedures or strategies (Grimmitt, 2000, p.18). The former he argued were general laws or substantive hypotheses about teaching and learning which inform strategies and procedures. He explained that these should, on the whole, be generic and then expressed in terms of religious education more explicitly. A procedure or strategy, he argued, was about applying these principles to the teaching and learning in RE.

### **1.2.1 The phenomenological approach**

Prior to the 1988 Education Act, there were already moves in schools to explore ways of teaching Christianity in a non-confessional framework to all pupils who came from increasingly diverse religious and non-religious heritage (Brown, 2000, p.53). One response to this was the phenomenological or world religions approaches. These approaches involved exploring religious phenomena and viewed religion as formed of different dimensions such as doctrine, ritual and ethics (Smart 1968). This approach, summarised by Grimmitt (2000, p.27), is based on three pedagogical principles, namely self-understanding, understanding and thinking about religion, and dialogue with experience and living religions. This approach was advocated primarily through the Schools Council



Working Paper Number 36 (1971). Based on the work of Smart (1968) who was director of the project, there was an emphasis placed on pupils entering with understanding into a variety of different perspectives about religion. The Working Paper set out aims such as promoting awareness of religious issues, appreciating the challenges and consequences of belief and awareness of the contribution of religion to human culture. Within this model, learning and teaching aimed to promote both academic and personal forms of knowledge and understanding. Grimmitt (2000) claims that the use of Smart's dimensions of religions (Smart, 1968), on which this approach was based, was close to a pedagogical strategy. However, he argues that the principles were not fully understood or developed (Grimmitt, 2000, p.28). Grimmitt maintains that there were variations in the interpretation of the principles leading to confused and mixed messages about the nature of RE.

The Chichester Project was a phenomenological approach which placed Christianity in a world religions context (Erricker, 1987). However, according to Grimmitt the 'dialogue with experience' aspect of the initial approach was not fully developed, since the focus was on teaching about phenomena and not enabling pupils to interpret their own experiences in light of their studies (Grimmitt, 2000, p.29). However, Alberts (2007) who undertakes a review of RE approaches across Europe, disagrees with this conclusion, maintaining that the project sought to provide a balance between informing students about Christianity and developing their own understanding and perspectives (2007, p.188). Even taking this into account, my analysis of the project suggests it had limitations as its major focus was secondary school RE, and it did not fully explore the implications of the approach in primary school settings. In addition, according to Grimmitt, the project led to a content-centred approach to teaching RE, rather than a focus on pedagogy (ibid., p.29). For example, the project produced texts to support better understanding of Christian beliefs and practices. This focus on content rather than pedagogy influenced the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) model syllabuses (1994), since their aim was to identify what must be taught, rather than how it may be taught. Nevertheless, some of Erricker's earlier works (1982, 1984) give examples of more innovative strategy in terms of a focus on

pupil response, and this approach will be taken up later when exploring constructivism.

The world religions approach transformed RE from religious instruction based on Christian scripture, to a phenomenological approach based on the teaching of world religions. This shift has influenced RE since the late 1970s until the present day. It contributed to changes in the legal framework, as RE was reinterpreted within a changing social landscape. The challenge for the religious educator in a Church of England school is that this approach is primarily based on religion as function, as defined by Smart's dimensions. Religion is defined in terms of phenomena and this can lead to accusations of reductionism, i.e. reducing religion into a categories or components. For those teaching in Church of England schools this approach also sidelines questions relating to 'truth'. As Gearon (2013, p.112) stresses, this is an approach rooted in secular social science, not theology. Therefore, I argue that this approach has serious limitations in a Church of England school context.

### **1.2.2 The experiential approach**

An alternative approach to RE was put forward by David Hay and John Hammond (Hammond and Hay, eds., 1990). This was developed further by Nye in the late 1990s (Hay with Nye, 1998). The aim of Hay and his colleagues was to redress the balance in terms of understanding religious phenomena, since they felt that religious phenomena were being seen purely in objective terms, rather than about the experiences of religious people (Hay, 1986). However, Grimmer (2000) maintains there was a tendency in this approach for pupils to 'learn from their own experience', rather than to learn about or from religious phenomena. According to Grimmer (2000) their focus was on procedures and not principles. This experiential approach explored whether it was possible for ordinary and religious experience to be brought into a mutually informing relationship (Grimmer 2000, pp.32ff). Hay and his colleagues aimed to help pupils achieve this by developing empathy through challenging a child's secular consciousness. They designed exercises to help pupils focus on their own personal and inner experiences. The methods Hay and Nye developed were largely about exploring the 'spiritual', and their main text (Hammond, and Hay, eds., 1990) was essentially a teaching resource. Pupils were encouraged to keep an open mind, to explore different ways of seeing, and

to become more personally aware. One can argue that these objectives are all primarily about spiritual development which is an aim within the broader education curriculum (National Curriculum, 2013, p.5; Ofsted: School Inspection Handbook, 2016). According to Ofsted (2016), spiritual development is defined as the ability to be reflective about one's own beliefs which inform one's perspective on life and interest in and respect for other faiths, feelings and values. In addition, it is about a sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves and the world, use of imagination and creativity and a willingness to reflect on experiences. However, they are unclear in terms of objectives for RE. Grimmit (2000) argues that whilst Hay and Hammond wanted to enable young people to feel empathy with the experience of religious people, this led to activities and exercises being introduced which were not founded on pedagogical principles.

Alberts (2007, p.140) is equally critical of this experiential approach particularly because it takes one theological construct as an overarching framework, namely the plurality of religions. She goes as far as to claim that the approach contradicts the view many people have of their own religions (Alberts, 2007, p.141). Therefore, I argue that these pedagogical tasks are strategies that can be employed by the teacher to gain certain outcomes in terms of spiritual development, but are not about effective pedagogy in RE. In my view, the ethics of this approach can also be questioned, since it is possible that 'spiritual experiences' could be contrived or engineered in the classroom. There is a possibility that if spirituality is nurtured, then it can cross the line between education and faith formation in a school context, particularly in a Church school context. The parameters of Hay and Nye's work are unclear in terms of the purpose in the religious education classroom. In their resource (Hammond and Hay, ed., 1990) there are few references to specific religious material or content; they refer more to spirituality and experience. This lack of clarity about purpose and what is to be taught in RE is particularly relevant to Church schools as I explain in Chapter Two. It is interesting that the work Nye has undertaken in more recent years has focused specifically on faith-based settings such as churches (Nye 2009), where faith formation is a goal. In my view, this is a better setting for the approach being advocated here.

Grimmitt (2000) has suggested that in recent years Hay and Nye have worked backwards to develop principles based on the teaching methods they have introduced. In particular, Hay and Nye's research in schools (Hay with Nye, 1998) identified relational consciousness as a principle. This was understood in terms of a level of awareness or perceptiveness among children when talking about spirituality, and that all spiritual talk referred to how the children related to reality - either God, others, themselves or the world. Hay cites Alister Hardy (Hay with Nye, 1998, p.16) who claims that spiritual experiences are a biological disposition and that such experiences can lead to good mental health and happiness. He argues that social pressures such as materialism and consumerism are hostile to this relational consciousness and that this can sabotage children's spirituality. Thus, Hay and Nye developed 'techniques' to enable children to engage with spirituality or relational consciousness.

According to Hay some children almost seem to unlearn the spiritual, and this is often at a time when they are questioning their own identity and where they are more aware of scientific and rational thinking, and being told at school that results and knowledge matter (Hay, 2000, p.83). Thus, Hay says it is the teacher's job, and more specifically the RE teacher's job, to help children to express their individuality, to explore new dimensions in life and encourage personal awareness (Hay and Nye, 1998, p.163). One of the key criticisms of their initial work is that it provided a very personalised view of spirituality, which is not open to broader interpretations from within and beyond the Christian tradition (Hay and Nye, 1998). For example, there is little, if any reference in their work to the relational nature of spirituality in the Christian tradition, nor an unpacking of the nature of spirituality in theological terms - for example relational spirituality as defined by a Trinitarian Godhead (Diocese of Norwich, 2012, p.8).

The experiential approach is based on natural history and the concept that religious or spiritual experiences are a human universal (Hay, 2000, p.70). The work of Hay and Nye has had an impact on the understanding of the spiritual dimension of RE (Stern, 2006, pp.74-78), however it has also led to confusion in comprehending the nature of the subject and its purpose, particularly in relation to 'learning from religion and belief' (more commonly referred to as Attainment Target Two, as referenced in the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2012, p.24). A number of influential religious educators, such as

Blaylock (Rivett, Mackley and Blaylock, eds., 2008), have placed special importance on the spiritual dimension of RE, particularly through Attainment Target Two, but I would argue that this has led to further confusion about what effective pedagogy looks like. Hay and Nye have influenced teachers who place an emphasis on the personal nature of evaluation of religion as part of Attainment Target Two, i.e. what it means to me. However, other educators, such as Hunt (2013), whilst acknowledging the importance of the spiritual dimension, have focused on developing the impersonal nature of evaluation of religion, i.e. what it means to the believer. Hunt claims that the meaning of Attainment Target Two has been misinterpreted, and there has been an emphasis on the personal evaluation of religion, and not enough on impersonal evaluation. In my view, the experiential approach has contributed to this confusion.

According to Ofsted (2007, 2010, 2013) this lack of clarity about the meaning of Attainment Target Two and the wider purpose of the subject has led to weak outcomes in RE. For example,

The key factor inhibiting achievement is teachers' lack of understanding of the content and pedagogy of the subject and, specifically, their uncertainty about how pupils make progress in their learning in RE.

(Ofsted, 2007, p.10)

In addition, as I argue in Chapter Two, it has also contributed to confusion over the relationship between collective worship, values, spirituality and RE in Church of England schools.

### **1.2.3 The Critical Realist approach**

Two key exponents of the critical realist approach are Cooling and Wright. They both explain their positions in Grimmitt's (2000) book, but here I also use some of their earlier and later works to show the development of their thinking over time.

Cooling was concerned about the 'overly secular' educational criteria and unduly descriptive view of religious content (Cooling, 1994). Cooling argues that children leave school knowing some things Christians do, but not why they do them or their significance for faith. This point has more recently been made by Ofsted (2013).

The 2010 report highlighted the concern that too many pupils were leaving school with a very limited understanding of Christianity. Many of the schools visited for the previous report 'did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive and systematic investigation of the core beliefs of Christianity'. The development of this understanding remains one of the weakest aspects of achievement.

(Ofsted, 2013, p.9)

This suggests that the understanding of the impact and meaning of Christian belief was, and remains, elusive in many RE classrooms. Cooling (1994) argued that RE materials must be used in a way that reflect their use in the community of faith believers, and should focus on the meaning for these believers. Children, Cooling argues, should be asking questions such as, 'What does it mean to be a Christian... Muslim... Sikh...?'. For Cooling, it is important that children come to an accurate understanding of what religious adherents believe.

In developing a pedagogy, Cooling was influenced by Bruner (1997), arguing that any concept can be taught to any child as long as it is appropriately translated. Cooling (1994) developed a pedagogical procedure called 'Concept Cracking'. This consisted of four main steps:

Step 1: Unpack the beliefs e.g the concepts in a story, festival or belief

Step 2: Select one belief to explore

Step 3: Relate the belief to the children's experience

Step 4: Introduce the religious idea and make it relevant

(Cooling, 1994, p.11)

The approach was a hermeneutical one, as teachers engaged with biblical text to 'unpack' concepts and beliefs. Teachers worked alongside the children to interpret and develop an understanding of beliefs through engagement with text. However, the focus for Cooling's work was primarily Christian theological concepts, and this is a limitation of the approach.

Whilst this strategy was very appropriate for Church schools and their exploration of Christianity, it wasn't easily transferable to other religions (which they are required to teach). The model relied on a clear

understanding of the doctrines and teachings of each world religion and worldview. This meant not only that there was an assumption in the approach that teachers will have sound subject knowledge of Christianity to be able to teach it effectively using this approach, but also that all religions and beliefs could be treated in the same way. In addition, the hermeneutical methods used may be regarded as inappropriate by some members of world faiths. For example, using a hermeneutical approach to study the Qur'an may be questioned by some Muslims. Limited work has been done on transferring the model to other traditions (see for example, Smith, 2013). Smith, working in Key Stage One, attempted to use the approach to explore Judaism. Whilst the concepts being unpacked were on the whole appropriate, the choice of textual material, activities and the learning outcomes for some of the lessons did not seem to provide the best ways of approaching the concepts. This is most likely because the teacher was also trying to connect the learning to the local agreed syllabus requirements. This provided additional restraints for framing her work. In addition, there is little evidence of the approach being used to explore Dharmic traditions such as the Hindu or Buddhist faith.

There is also a danger that this approach becomes confessional since it is based on a view of religion as divine revelation (God revealing himself to humans), not function (the accumulation of wisdom). Followers of the Abrahamic religions generally believe that God reveals knowledge of himself, his will, and his divine providence, to the world of human beings. This is known as divine revelation. The approach also aims to view religion from within, so presenting the insiders' view. This has implications for RE, since unless framed carefully it can assume a theist position in the classroom. This may be implicit, but the values which underpin the classroom practice will be evident in the language and activity that take place. Cooling acknowledges this danger (1994, p.25) and suggests teachers use distancing devices, and consider the language they use with pupils in the classroom. So, although there are benefits to this approach, another way of framing it within a Church of England school context is required to ensure it is less exclusive and appropriate for all teachers to use.

Step Three of Cooling's model places an emphasis on human experience which reduces 'learning from religion' to spiritual development, thus

emphasising the personal, rather than the impersonal nature of evaluation as propounded by Grimmitt (2000). This analysis is supported by Cooling's own view of 'learning from' religion when he states that,

Spiritual development is the heart of what learning from religion means.

(Cooling, 1994, p.22)

However, Cooling (1994) criticises the more experiential approaches where RE is about promoting the exploration of human experience. Instead Cooling puts forward four ways in which the Concept Cracking approach promotes spiritual development, but is rooted at the same time in both a child-centred experiential approach, and a content-centred phenomenological approach. These four aspects are: a. encouraging empathy, b. reflecting and evaluating beliefs in order to shape attitude and behaviour, c. transformation (Cooling refers to this as 'changed by knowledge') and d. promoting conversation particularly through questioning. Whilst these principles are clearly articulated, the practical outcomes from this work have largely focused on relating religious material to human experience, rather than challenging the truth claims of faith. The reasons for this are unclear in the literature, but it may be for practical reasons such as a lack of professional development or because teachers find it easier to focus on child-centred aspects.

The dilemma for many Church schools is providing RE within a Christian theological framework, yet one which is not confessional. Whilst to some degree Cooling's Concept Cracking model enables this to take place, it is limited because of its focus on Christianity alone and its over-emphasis on reflection and human experience. These limitations are exemplified in the most recent project developed by Cooling and Smith, called 'What if learning' (Cooling and Smith, 2013). This project seeks to exemplify a Christian way of teaching; it is therefore rooted in Christian theology, in particular in the concepts of faith, hope and love. The approach advocated is applied to all curriculum subjects in Church schools, not just RE. The pedagogical approach is based on three principles:

- Seeing anew. This means seeing the pupils, the subject matter and what goes on in the classroom through the lens of Christian faith, hope and love.



- Engagement. This refers to how pupils engage with learning. For Cooling, the central issue is not the ideas and information to be learned, but how each person in the class is to relate to them and to one another.
- Reshaping practice. For Cooling, this is the natural step that results from seeing anew and considering how pupils engage. It leads to concrete classroom practice.

(Cooling, Cooling and Smith, 2013)

These three principles are based on the work of Wenger's (1999) communities of practice. In this work, Wenger asserts that communities of practice are based on a number of interactions. The first of these is imagination. By this, Wenger means our worldview or the 'lens we look through into the world' (Wenger, 1999, p.176). How we perceive the world will have an impact on how we make sense of it and what we learn from an activity. Thus, Cooling and Smith ask questions about what imagination drives a Christian educator (Cooling, 2013). The second principle is that of participation. The way pupils interact and take part in their learning is key for Wenger. The way pupils participate shapes their imagination, and how they perceive the learning that takes place. Again, Cooling and Smith ask questions about what the most appropriate forms of participation are within a Christian context. The final principle is one of reification and repertoire. Wenger argues that imagination and ways of participating shape practice; for example, in terms of how the environment is set up, which methodology or strategy is used, and in the interactions that take place. Thus, Cooling and Smith argue that a classroom can be 'Christian' in terms of its atmosphere, rhythms and pedagogy (Cooling, Cooling and Smith, 2013).

The work of the theologian Dykstra (2005) has also influenced Cooling and Smith. Dykstra maintains that faith is formed and nurtured by taking part in Christian practices, not just by understanding Christian theology; for example, by experiencing worship, prayer and acts of social justice. Unlike Hay and Nye, spiritual development for Cooling and Smith is seen as more than a private matter, but is connected to a way of life. For Cooling and Smith, therefore, a Christian education will reflect not only Christian beliefs, but also a Christian way of living. Dykstra writes that,

Christian educators need to think about how to lead people beyond reliance on 'random acts of kindness' into shared patterns of life that are informed by the deepest insights of our tradition, and about how to lead people beyond privatised spiritualities into more thoughtful participation in God's activity in the world.

(Dykstra, 2005, p.67)

So, for Cooling and Smith, the imagination, participation, reification and repertoire are seen through a lens which is about active Christian living through the concepts of faith, hope and love. The pedagogical principles are rooted in theology. All teaching and learning is 're-imagined' in the light of faith, hope and love. The principles are therefore generic across all curriculum subjects, and this is one of its limitations.

For example, on the 'What if Learning' website (Cooling, Cooling and Smith, 2013), the first aspect of the framework 'Seeing anew' is explained and examples of strategies are given. One of these is seeing anew towards humility and hospitality. This example provides a short exposition of the theology lying behind humility and hospitality. It is aimed at teachers, so the content is carefully written to allow access for everyone whatever their theological background. The questions raised aim to help the teacher form a new imagination. These questions serve the teacher well in terms of engaging their thinking, and supporting their own journey of discovery in terms of rethinking their imagination. The final section on what this means for the school, however, does not talk about teaching and learning in terms of pedagogy. Instead, it refers to ethos, to the content of the curriculum and the attitude of the teacher and pupil.

The 'What if learning' website is extensive, and includes examples of strategies for all three principles (i.e. seeing anew, engagement and reshaping practice). It gives some classroom examples of how these principles are to be put into practice. An example for RE has the title, 'What if religious education helped students respond effectively to difference?' (Figure 1). In this example, the theology of humility and hospitality is applied to classroom practice. This shapes the teacher's thinking and has an impact on their practice. However, this is about specific technique not pedagogy. The 'What if learning' approach tends to give examples of strategy based on a generic Christian pedagogy, rather than talking about

how the principles would be applied more specifically in each subject. This is particularly important for RE because of its relationship to the Christian ethos of a school.

**What if religious education helped students to respond respectfully to difference?**

Heather taught in a rural, mono-cultural school. She found teaching the Islamic prayer section of the syllabus difficult.

"I found explaining the various prayer positions was pretty easy but felt the lesson fell apart because the students giggled at pictures of Islamic prayer. I got very frustrated with my students' attitude and even more frustrated with myself because my strategy of lecturing the pupils about their childish reaction wasn't achieving anything.

"I decided to change my strategy. I started with how we humans use body language to communicate. I gave some clear signals through my own body language as part of this! The introduction gave opportunity for fun exercises in communicating ideas non-verbally. I then introduced a picture of Muslims prostrating themselves at prayer and I asked what this prayerful body language was saying. I still got some giggle reactions, but instead of squashing them I asked why it made them giggle; this way of praying obviously felt alien to most of the class so we talked about it. The responses were honest and reflected that they were challenged by the subject. I let the students talk forthrightly but insisted that it remain respectful.

"We talked about what it would be like to prostrate in front of someone else and then I introduced the idea of submission. We discussed this and I pointed out that submission wasn't something that figured much in a Western, secular way of life. To end I gave them a reflective exercise where they had to work on a response to the question, 'What are the good things about submission and when isn't it a good thing?'"

(Cooling, Cooling and Smith, 2013)

Figure 1: Extract from 'What if Learning' website

Nevertheless, the value and impact of the 'What if Learning' project cannot be underestimated. In 2013, there were a number of conferences held to engage both teachers and Diocesan advisers with the approach. A number of advisers are using the approach with schools, and the piloting of the

material continues. The 'What if Learning' website includes resources for schools to run their own training.

Some of the concerns raised in relation to other pedagogical approaches apply to this approach as well. The aim of RE in particular is confused, and the website is unclear about the purpose of education more generally. Smith frequently uses the term 'faith formation' (2011), but he writes in a Canadian context where Christian schools are concerned with Christian faith formation. In a UK context, in Church of England schools, faith formation is not an aim of RE as expressed in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016). This is one reason for exploring in Chapter Two the confusion about the purpose of RE in Church of England schools. In terms of this particular pedagogical approach, one might argue that the aim of RE as part of 'What if Learning' is spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is generally understood to mean the way in which specific practices can help one progress within a particular religious or belief tradition. However, this claim is not explicitly made in the work of Cooling or Smith. There is reference to teachers participating in the transforming work of grace as an aim of Christian education more broadly on the 'What if Learning' website, and this would seem to imply a specifically Christian understanding of spiritual formation. Placing RE within this context of the transforming work of grace leads to further confusion about the purpose of the subject and the role of the teacher. The approach may enable the Christian teacher to rethink their worldview in the classroom; to live out their faith authentically. However, for the non-Christian teacher in a Church school it creates some challenges if they are to reimagine what they are doing from a specifically Christian perspective. The approach, if taken literally, appears to imply that all teachers in Church schools must be at least sympathetic, if not practising Christians. So, whilst the approach has merit, it is also potentially exclusive. There is also a danger that RE will become a form of faith nurture. This is not to negate the impact of the process of seeing anew, engaging and reshaping practice, but, as the exponents of this pedagogy seem to imply, if there is a 'Christian way of teaching', then this would seem to imply exclusivity.

Andrew Wright (2003), like Cooling, places himself within the critical realist stance. He challenged those who have emphasised the experiential side of religion, and became concerned with the lack of emphasis on truth claims.

He highlights the danger of post-modernism with its emphasis on plurality of meaning and lack of objective criteria for the determination of truth. He is critical of an RE which reduces it to a child's capacity for spiritual experience and self-reflection. Wright argues that many RE pedagogies have an implicit worldview where freedom of belief and tolerance are the principles, and religious dogma becomes a 'private thing' (Wright, 2000, p.171). In particular, he is critical of the work of Clive Erricker (2000), stating that the constructivist approach ignores the specific truth claims put forward by many religious and secular worldviews, and allows pupils to construct their own personal account of reality. Wright (2003) argues that in fact the constructivist approach is confessional in nature, in that it is based on post-modern relativism. It therefore takes a 'position' on religion. He maintains, therefore, that it is hypocritical in nature in terms of the pedagogy it advocates.

Wright argues that the critical realist approaches the question of truth with an open mind and equips pupils to engage in the quest for themselves (Wright, 2003, p.286). At the heart of his assertion is the purpose of religious education; for Wright, it is not about human flourishing or spiritual development, but about the quest for truth. His key principles are that RE should seek to do justice to the horizon of religion (contrasting and conflicting perspectives) and the horizon of the pupil (pupils' views in their present reality). For Wright, RE seeks to enable a critical dialogue between these two horizons. It seeks to equip pupils to recognise and respond appropriately to power structures inherent in religious and educational discourse. The aim of RE for Wright is that knowledge of religions should be the gateway to truth about them (Gearon, 2013, p.123), and Wright sees the most appropriate pedagogy as asking intelligent and interrogative questions (Wright, 2003, p.282). Gearon (2013), who explores major themes in pedagogy drawing on international research, asserts that this focus on a search for truth risks over-conceptualising religion and making it too philosophical. Gearon also suggests that in fact the approach is counter-productive, as it encourages a misrepresentation of religion and increases a sense of dualism between reason and experience (Gearon, 2013, p.126).

The key for Wright is to cultivate intelligent conversation between the two horizons, however procedures to do this were underdeveloped. Whilst, the

work of FORASE (Forum on Religious and Spiritual Education, Kings College, London) continues to undertake studies through a project entitled, *Critical Religious Education at Secondary and Primary School Level*, the outcomes of this work have so far provided limited pedagogical frameworks. The work of Hookway (2004) remains one of the only texts available to support RE teachers in using a critical realist approach. Hookway states that within her pedagogical approach, 'religion is seen as the experiential response of people to an external reality' (Hookway, 2004, p.4).

Her aim is for pupils to tackle the difficult issues of truth in a plural society, allowing them to have dialogue with conflicting truth claims. Hookway states that she comes from a Christian critical realist perspective, and the examples in her work are primarily Christian. The pedagogical procedures follow a similar approach to that of Cooling's concept cracking approach:

Step 1: Problematising: the key issue relating to questions of truth is identified by the teacher, and formalised as a key question.

Step 2: Mirrors: pupils relate the issue to their own lives, and explore their response to the key question.

Step 3: Windows: pupils look at and listen to different approaches to truth. These may be theistic views, secular and postmodern.

Step 4: Microscope: the different responses are examined closely, and are evaluated.

Step 5: Reflection: pupils look back over their learning and reconsider their answer to the key question.

(Hookway, 2004, p.5)

The similarities with the work of Cooling are evident. In both pedagogies, there is an emphasis on engagement with human experience at the start of the process to enable pupils to engage with a concept. This concept is then related to religious material, and then linked back to human experience at the end.

Wright argues that education can never be neutral or value-free, and Cooling would agree with this. Since education is not value-free, it therefore requires a critical element, and to some extent Hookway achieves this in

her approach. Wright argues that a child-centred approach, which has become popular in some local authority agreed syllabuses (e.g. Living Difference, 2006), is an ideological view in its own right, and does not allow for this critical element effectively. In more recent works, Wright explains the influence of the Variation Theory of Learning and the critical realist philosophy of Bhaskar (Hella and Wright, 2009) on his thinking. For Wright, living truthfully in accordance with the nature of reality is the primary aim of RE. Progression, for him, is about deepening understanding, not about skills. He argues that through skills-based learning, students may construct their own subjective truths, but do not engage with 'truth' (Wright, 2011). Wright claims that skills-based approaches are rooted in a constructivist philosophy which does not do justice to the objectivity of the external world.

This has led Wright to put forward a knowledge-centred education, in which knowledge is understood as a reciprocal relationship between the knower and the object known. Wright (2011) asserts that to understand the world better is simultaneously to understand oneself better. This is based on the Variation Theory of Learning which is an approach to pedagogy developed within the phenomenographic research tradition (Marton, 1981), which investigates different ways in which people experience or think about something. It maintains that for learning to take place, there must be an object of learning or phenomenon to be studied. For Wright, pupils should engage with a variety of contested aspects of religion (phenomenon) and through this develop appropriate levels of religious literacy<sup>4</sup>. For Wright, learning about and learning from are entwined, so that learning is never abstract; one always learns about something and as such learning necessarily changes you as a person (Hella and Wright, 2009, p.60). Students learn about religion from within the horizon of their own worldview, thus learning from religion is about the relationship between their own worldview and that which they are studying.

In light of this, Wright puts forward a virtues-centred approach characterised by attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and

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<sup>4</sup> There is no universally agreed definition of the term 'religious literacy'. In general, it is understood to mean having an understanding of religious beliefs and practices and the ability to apply this understanding in everyday life through interaction with others

responsibility. For Wright, the aim of RE is to empower pupils to live good lives (ibid., p.62), and he asserts that the Variation Theory of Learning and phenomenography provide tools to construct an appropriate pedagogy. It appears that Wright has moved away from the purpose of RE being the gateway to understanding truth claims, and that he now understands it in terms of living a good life. In addition, the pedagogical procedures to accompany this new approach are not explicit. Within a Church school setting, it is unclear whether the critical realist approach is rooted within a Christian theological framework, such as that propounded by 'What if Learning', or whether it is primarily about 'being good' which is a universal liberal principle. Critical realism appears to encompass many approaches to teaching and learning, with different sets of aims and purposes.

#### **1.2.4 Human Development approaches**

The most influential pedagogical principles in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were those surrounding the concept of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion, which have their roots in human development theory. Underlying this theory is the assertion that learning will contribute to the personal development of the learner (Grimmitt, 2000 p.35). These principles still underpin many agreed syllabus documents; for example, the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus 2012, and the Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus 2013. The roots of this approach lie in the work of the Westhill Project (1980-86) where the principal aim of RE was,

To help children mature in relation to their own patterns of belief and behaviour through exploring religions, beliefs, and practices and related human experience.

(Read, Rudge and Teece, 1992, p.2)

This project placed importance on pedagogical procedures which would allow pupils to translate insights gained from the study of religion and worldviews into personal terms. It placed pupils' personal development at the heart of RE, and the context in which they were growing up was seen of crucial importance. According to Rudge (2000, p.93) the process of RE implies an encounter with a field of enquiry; thus RE is seen as a process of engagement with content which leads to personal development. The field of enquiry was a key focus for the Westhill Project (1992). The model developed an interrelationship between traditional belief systems, shared



human experience and individual patterns of belief. The traditional belief systems were seen in functional terms, that is in terms of what place they have in the field of enquiry for RE. The focus was on the educational value of content within these belief systems. Shared human experience referred to the questions that humans ask themselves about life, its meaning and purpose. Individual patterns of belief referred to the experiences, beliefs and values of individual pupils in the classroom.

Rudge (2000) sees a dynamic relationship between the different fields of enquiry. For example, he maintains that religious beliefs function not only as answers to questions of shared human experience, but also raise questions about life, meaning and purpose. Therefore, the different fields of enquiry are in dialogue, they are interdependent of one another. The creation of a curriculum based on this approach was built largely around a conceptual framework which underpinned the rest of the model; skills, attitudes and knowledge were subordinate. Rudge, like Cooling, was influenced by Bruner (1997) and asserted that any concept could be taught to pupils at any age provided the structure of learning was appropriate.

A number of criticisms were levelled at the project (Rudge, 2000, pp.104ff), mainly to do with the aims and purpose of RE and its emphasis on human development. However, like the work of Wright, its fundamental limitations were with the actual practical classroom outcomes in terms of pedagogical strategies. The focus in many of the resources and support material was on a systematic study of religion, without effective dialogue with human experience. For example, photo packs were produced which offered examples of religious phenomena but no connection to shared human experience (e.g. Read, 1996) The interrelationship between the three aspects was not clearly transferred into classroom practice. Nevertheless, the three fields of enquiry and related attainment targets did present a more coherent way of understanding the subject.

The links between the Westhill Project and Grimmitt's later work, developing the concepts of 'learning about' and 'learning from' can clearly be seen. Grimmitt (1987) states clearly what he understands by learning about and learning from religion in his seminal work *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987):

When I speak about pupils learning about religion I am referring to what the pupils learn about the beliefs, teachings and practices of the great religious traditions of the world. I am also referring to what pupils learn about the nature and demands of ultimate questions, about the nature of a 'faith response' to ultimate questions, about the normative views of the human condition and what it means to be human as expressed in and through traditional belief systems or stances for living in a naturalist kind.

When I speak about learning from religion I am referring to what pupils learn from their studies in religion about themselves... The process of learning from religion involves, I suggest, engaging through two different types of evaluation. Impersonal evaluation involves being able to distinguish and make critical valuations of truth claims, beliefs and practices of different religious traditions and of religion itself. Personal evaluation begins as an attempt to confront and evaluate religions, beliefs and values... becoming a process of self-evaluation.

(Grimmitt, 1987, pp.255-6)

There have been various interpretations of Grimmitt's model, and many of these interpretations have lifted the pedagogical procedure out of its original context. Grimmitt (2000) himself argues that 'learning about' and 'learning from' were conceived as a procedure, but that they have been made into a principle, particularly in the *Non-Statutory National Framework* (QCA, 2004). Teece (2010), who worked alongside Rudge, has analysed various interpretations of the model. Teece (2010) shows how confusion has been created about the object of study in terms of 'religion' or 'religions'. In addition, the evidence from Ofsted (2007) suggests that the model was not understood by teachers in terms of creating effective learning experiences for pupils. Teece (2010) argues that the weakness of 'learning from' religion is often because the teacher is not sure what the pupils are to learn about first. Therefore, the pupils do not 'learn from' religion at all. 'Learning from' often falls into 'learning from human experience' rather than 'learning from religion', because it is not clear what educators mean by 'learning about religion'. Teece (2010) argues that there is a danger of reducing religion into myth, symbol and so on, and that this does not allow pupils to learn about or learn from religion adequately. He

argues that second-order frameworks (what others might call categories or dimensions) for religion are useful as they enable religion to be seen in light of what it means to be human from within a particular religious or belief tradition.

For Teece (2010) it is,

Learning about religions within an understanding of how we might conceptualise religion as a distinctive phenomenon that best enables pupils to engage in Grimmitt's personal and impersonal evaluation... .

(Teece, 2010, p.101)

The focus for RE teachers, according to Teece, is to ensure accurate representation of the spirituality of religious traditions. Teachers need to concentrate on the beliefs and values that allow interaction between learning about and learning from to take place.

As highlighted previously in relation to the experiential approach, Hunt (2013) critiques 'learning from' religion. He uses the analogy of looking under a microscope, explaining that personal evaluation is about putting oneself under the microscope, whereas impersonal evaluation is putting religion under the microscope. For Hunt, personal evaluation is an important part of RE, but does not lend itself to assessment as it is a subjective activity. Hunt argues that the focus in the *Non-Statutory National Framework* assessment levels (QCA, 2004) has been on personal evaluation, i.e. pupils responding to religious material, rather than asking questions about it. Hunt maintains that too much RE is about an enquiry into the child and their own human experience, rather than a study of religion. Hunt argues that the solution is to base assessment of 'learning from religion' on impersonal evaluation which grapples with truth claims, and where judgments are not just a matter of opinion or taste. Hunt's analysis suggests that assessment and pedagogy must be rooted in a better understanding of the purpose of the subject in terms of learning about and learning from religion.

As far as Grimmitt (1987) is concerned 'learning about' and 'learning from' were procedures or strategies, not principles. The principles which underpinned the approach were about the interrelationship between the

religious life world and pupil life world (Grimmitt, 1987, p.141), the application of religious insights to pupils' understanding of their own situations and experience (Grimmitt, 1987, p.241) and the contribution of RE to promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Grimmitt, 1987, p.213). This suggests that RE is primarily about the formation of the child in terms of personal development.

This approach based on human development theory led to core concepts being identified and explored through themes and led to a significant publication called the *Gift to the Child* (Hull, 2000). The *Gift to the Child* begins with the pupil receiving some easily understood component of a religion (e.g. a song, prayer, artefact) then progressing to a more complex understanding. The procedures here involve engagement, exploration, contextualisation and reflection. The focus is on the development of the child, with the means being the study of religion.

This approach has strong connections with other pedagogies such as Berryman's Godly Play (1991), and related reflective storytelling approaches being used in many Church of England schools (Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, 2010). The children engage with a story, explore it, contextualise it, and then reflect or respond to it. Godly Play has its roots both in confessional settings and in Montessori principles, and Nye (2009) is an advocate of this approach in her later work. This suggests that the focus on personal development suppresses an aim for pupils to better understand religion and belief; what Wright (1993) refers to as religious literacy. Linked to this is whether the religion and belief are sufficiently explored and understood from a believer's perspective. The evidence suggests that this pedagogical approach has led to a focus on the pupils learning about themselves and developing personally, rather than 'learning about and from religion'. A renewed emphasis on religious literacy, rather than personal development, in RE has also been called for in recent reports (for example, Dinham and Shaw, 2015).

### **1.2.5 The Interpretive approach**

An attempt to counter this human development approach was put forward by Jackson (1997) and was based on interpretive anthropology. The Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU), headed by Jackson, placed an emphasis on the interactive nature of the pupils'

engagement with the content, encouraging pupils to use material from a religious tradition as a stimulus to reflect on matters of personal significance or concern. The aim was for children to become active interpreters of religious meaning-making, and not passive observers.

Strategies such as 'building bridges' and providing opportunities for reflection and constructive criticism were built into the pedagogical procedures. The approach sought to present religions as groups of individuals, and groups within groups, rather than as 'isms'. Jackson showed that religions were being misrepresented as homogenised belief systems, rather than seeing religion as part of lived human experience (Jackson, 1997). Thus, whilst the work of Hay and Nye transformed an understanding of 'learning from religion' in terms of framing it within spiritual development, Jackson sought to redefine learning about religion as,

...to understand how religious people and religious groups within the same religious tradition interpret and express their understanding of faith in a variety of ways, requiring pupils to become active interpreters of religious meaning making, not just passive observers or recipients of information about a tradition.

(Jackson, 2000, p.39)

The interpretive approach was based on representation, interpretation and reflexivity. It was concerned with how religions are presented, thus the approach transforms 'learning about religion' to learning about religious traditions and the complexity and diversity within and between them. Interpretation is achieved through 'genuine empathy' (Jackson, 2012, p.192); it is about discovery from the inside. In many ways, this is similar in aim to Cooling's 'What does it mean to be a believer?' (Cooling, 1994). Reflectivity is understood to be about transformation or edification, whereby the pupil is encouraged to review their understanding of their own worldview in relation to what they have studied.

The similarities with critical realism can be seen in terms of procedure. There is an emphasis on hermeneutical enquiry and the critical examination of different ideas of truth. Pupils are encouraged to bring two sources together to allow them to shed light on one another, and they are encouraged to draw on their own experiences in order to interpret material they are exploring. This follows a similar process to that of Hookway

(2004), where the 'mirror' (i.e. pupils' own views) informs the 'window' (i.e. other approaches to truth) view. Finally, like Hookway, the pupils are encouraged to take part in edification activities to use religious material to reflect on matters that concern or interest them. However, the actual practical outcomes of this research for the classroom were limited in terms of the production of text books which, Jackson admits, did not fully expound the pedagogical principles. In particular, those designed for Key Stage One (Jackson, 1997) were reliant on the teacher, not pupils, to undertake the hermeneutical enquiry.

The interpretive approach (Jackson, 1997, 2004) was employed as the main theoretical stimulus in the REDCo project proposal (Jackson et al., 2007; Weisse, 2007). This proposal saw the interpretive approach as having potential for developing theory and method for both the field research of the project and for the development of suitable pedagogies for teaching about religions in contemporary societies in ways that would give attention to issues of dialogue and conflict. The REDCo team identified the following ways on their website (Jackson et al., 2013) in which the interpretive approach would drive their work:

The interpretive approach should be seen as a theoretical 'stimulus' for the project as a whole.

The approach would provide a framework and stimulus for the discussion of issues relating to research and pedagogy.

The importance of the key concepts of the interpretive approach was not to impose any uniformity in theory, epistemology or method, but to assist in the identification and clarification of issues in theory, methodology and pedagogy.

The approach was seen in terms of a series of questions to be reviewed as research and pedagogical development proceeded. The questions applied equally to the research process (theory and method) and to the development of pedagogical approaches.

(Jackson et al., 2013)

The REDCo project highlighted the misrepresentation of religion that often takes place in the classroom but so far has not provided a coherent pedagogy that can be applied across all Key Stages effectively. Gearon

(2013) goes further, and maintains that the focus on ethnography has created problems which he claims are misrepresentative of religion (Gearon, 2013, p.130), and create unnecessary complexity in the classroom for teachers. He states that if one is to present a faithful representation of religion, then using the detailed views of children may be flawed. He maintains that most adherents of religions would not be able to accept the finding of the ethnographic approach as acceptable primary source material for RE (ibid., p.130).

The interpretive pedagogy is based on representation and interpretation, where an 'insider's' view of a faith or worldview is valued and where learners are active in 'walking alongside' members of faith. The interpretive approach has potential to allow pupils to deepen their own views and perspectives through authentic encounters with a range of religious traditions and worldviews. This approach has distinct merits in a diverse and changing global community. It is certainly an approach that may have potential within a Church of England context. Its weakness lies primarily in transfer from principles to practical classroom procedures.

#### **1.2.6 The Constructivist approach**

Building on the work of Grimmer (1987), and heavily influenced by constructivist theory, Erricker and Erricker (2000) researched the experiences and thinking of children and how they engage in the construction of personal meaning in their lives in the Children and Worldviews Project (1993). For the Errickers (2000), it was meaning rather than truth that underpinned the education of the whole child. RE was seen in terms of existential enquiry. The key principle was that of narrative pedagogy where all knowledge is relative; where belief systems were seen as grand narratives. For the Errickers, the key processes were identification, reflection and application; subject knowledge was largely replaced with process (Erricker, Lowndes and Bellchambers, 2011). Wright and Wright (2012) are particularly critical of this approach. For example, one issue arises concerning the accommodation of religious knowledge within a process, and whether by trying to 'accommodate' it, the nature of some religious concepts is misunderstood. This can lay the educator open to making assumptions about religious concepts and ideas, and even allowing one's own prejudices to be laid bare. The question remains whether faithful encounter with religious concepts can take place. From

within a religion a particular concept is understood in a particular way, but if pupils 'making meaning' or a 'construction of a world view' is the primary function of RE, there is a danger that an authentic understanding of religion may be lost.

The Errickers' (2000) approach through meaning-making requires dialogue to become the key methodology. Strategies such as communities of enquiry dominate, but within this one may argue that children are only focusing on their own spiritual development, and not on an understanding of religious truth claims. In many ways, the procedures employed by Erricker and his team in Hampshire (e.g. *Living Difference II*, 2011) have become skills-focused, and less about the content being taught. This is because knowledge is seen as a human construct, so the focus is not on the object of learning. The skills and enquiry approach have become the focus along with the students' own experiences and narrative, rather than the object of learning which is religion and belief.

It can be seen that this relativist, constructivist view of knowledge and learning may be in conflict with an absolutist view of religious truth held by many in the Church of England. This constructivist approach is based on psychological ways of understanding knowledge, i.e. that all knowledge is a human construct and that all knowledge is subject to multiple interpretations. In the context of this thesis, the issue is whether this understanding of knowledge should form the basis for a pedagogy for RE in Church of England schools where revelation (i.e. revealing of truth) is important in terms of knowledge and understanding.

In some ways there are similarities with the pedagogy proposed by Wright (2003), in that both redefine learning from religion, and both suggest that learning about and learning from happen simultaneously. For example, *Living Difference* (Hampshire Local Authority, 2006) has one attainment target and not two, namely 'interpreting religion in relation to human experience' (Erricker, 2011, p.62). The focus is on the skill of interpreting, rather than on learning about or learning from. However, this is a specific form of interpretation; namely, interpreting religion and belief in relation to the pupil's own experience and that of others. The focus is pupil-centred, not object-centred. The attainment target is embedded in the pedagogical process, and underpins the methodology used. There is a clear connection between the purpose of the subject and the pedagogical approach to be



used. There is a coherency between purpose and pedagogy, and principles and procedures are both well thought through so they impact on classroom practice (Wedell, 2009). This is positive, but the theory on which the approach is based does not sit well within the context of Church of England schools because of the underlying relativist assumptions.

Although the underlying theory is fundamentally different, the pedagogical outcomes are not dissimilar to the work of Wright (2003). Both approaches require pupils to undertake multiple interpretations from within their own worldview. Both reject the dualism of 'learning about' and 'learning from'. Whilst the aim for Wright is to interrogate truth claims and to seek what it means to 'live a good life', the aim for Erricker (2000) is to construct meaning. For both there is a relationship between the curriculum content and pupils' own self-understanding. The question can be asked whether for the RE teacher in the classroom there is actually a distinct difference between these two pedagogical approaches in practice and whether this matters.

Wright and Erricker would suggest that their approaches are fundamentally different. Wright argues this from a philosophical, theological and pedagogical point of view, and has been highly critical of constructivism (Wright and Wright, 2012, pp.223-233). He maintains that students need to be taught how to understand the world which requires wise discernment rather than rationalistic construction. For Wright, Erricker has given too much prominence to the separation of skills from the object of knowledge which has meant that the learning method becomes the focus rather than the topic of investigation (Wright and Wright, 2012, p.230). In reality, both of these approaches benefit from an enquiry-based approach not dissimilar to that highlighted as best practice in the *Religious Education: Realising the potential* report (Ofsted, 2013, p.23). The difference lies in the expected outcomes and purpose of study (i.e. to live a good life or to make meaning), and how the curriculum is constructed around appropriate content.

### **1.3 Conclusions**

In summary, the different approaches outlined all have strengths and weaknesses. Some approaches have had more influence than others on RE in all schools (e.g. Grimmitt 1987, 2000; Erricker, Lowndes and Bellchambers, 2011; Jackson 1997, 2004) and some have had particular

influence on Church of England schools such as Cooling (1994, 2013) and Wright (1993, 2003). The phenomenological approach transformed religious instruction into religious education, focusing on world religions rather than solely on Christianity. However, it did not effectively provide procedures to translate this effectively into the classroom. Wright (2003), Erricker (2000) Jackson (1997) and Read, Rudge and Teece (1992) all provided clear statements of the purpose of RE, although contrasting. This is a strength in these approaches and for Erricker (2000), Jackson (1997) and Read, Rudge and Teece (1992) has led to considerable influence in terms of the development of RE nationally. It demonstrates how the clarification of purpose is essential in terms of advocating any new pedagogical approach, including the one in this thesis. The reason for the success of *Living Difference* (2006, 2011, 2016), based on the work of Erricker (2000), is the distinct connection between purpose and pedagogy. The weakness of Wright (2003) and the limited influence of his work are largely due to the lack of practical pedagogical procedure or resources for teachers, particularly in the primary phase, despite a clear purpose. This may yet be partly resolved as a secondary school publication is due from a critical realist project overseen by Wright in late 2017. Jackson's (1997) work also lacks practical application to the classroom. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether any of the approaches enable teachers in Church of England schools to understand the purpose and place of RE in their particular context, and alongside this determine appropriate pedagogy to use.

The focus on personal development advocated by Hay and Nye (1998), and to some degree by Grimmer (1987) and Cooling (1994), has to a large extent caused confusion about the purpose of the subject. In particular, Hay and Nye's (1998) experiential approach confused RE with spiritual development, the effects of which are still being seen in the classroom today (Ofsted, 2013). Grimmer's (1987) work has to some extent been misunderstood, as the terms 'learning about' and 'learning from' became principles, rather than procedures. This led to confusion about the nature of 'learning from' religion where it became defined as personal development (Hunt, 2013). Whilst the work of Cooling (1994) has led to better practice in terms of teaching Christianity in some Church schools, the approach is

potentially exclusive and the purpose of the subject muddled with promoting the Christian ethos of the school (Making a Difference? 2014).

As a result of this first part of my literature review, there are three emerging themes which I wish to highlight as they have steered the focus of the thesis. These are:

- the importance of clarifying the purpose of RE.
- the link between the purpose of RE and the pedagogy employed in the classroom.
- the appropriateness (or not) of using certain pedagogies in Church of England schools because of the philosophies of education that lie behind them.

### **1.3.1 The importance of clarifying the purpose of religious education**

The six approaches outlined have to some extent created confusion about the aims and purpose of the subject called religious education. David Aldridge (2012) suggests having a 'toolkit' or 'pick and mix' approach to pedagogy confuses the different aims and philosophies on which the subject is based. He argues that certain pedagogies are rooted in specific goals and I would agree with this assertion. Teachers in Church of England schools need to be able to understand what the purpose of RE is, and also how the purpose of RE relates to the Christian ethos of the school. Ofsted (2013) and the *Making a Difference?* Report (Church of England, 2014) both show how a lack of understanding of purpose leads to weaker pupil outcomes because teachers are not clear about what they are doing. Unless the purpose of the subject is clear, then the pedagogical approach may be inappropriate. In Chapter Two I review the literature that links specifically to the Church of England school context in order to seek some clarification as to the purpose of the subject.

### **1.3.2 The link between the purpose of religious education and the pedagogy employed**

One of the most important issues raised is that relating to what has become known as 'learning from religion and belief', and its relationship to 'learning about'. In many cases, the pedagogical approach to 'learning about' religion seems clear; that is, to enquire into religion and belief so that pupils know

about and understand a range of religions and worldviews. However, if the primary purpose of RE is to 'learn from human experience' or spiritual development, then the pedagogical approach will reflect this. If the aim is for pupils to understand what it means to live a good life, then the pedagogical approach will be focused on achieving this. Thus, purpose and pedagogy are inextricably entwined. Unless the purpose of RE is clear, the pedagogy will not be understood or workable. The strength of the Living Difference (Hampshire Local Authority, 2006, 2011, 2016) approach is that both the purpose and pedagogy are coherent, related to one another and well-articulated. The weakness of this particular approach is that its lack of focus on knowledge and understanding of religion and belief means it does not meet the requirements of the *Statement of Entitlement for RE* (Church of England, 2011, 2016). Therefore, the Living Difference approach is not a solution for Church of England schools.

On the other hand, many of the approaches, but particularly those of Wright and Jackson, have clear theory, aims and purpose, but these have not been translated into clear methods or pedagogy in practice. Thus, even if the purpose is clear, the intrinsic link to pedagogy must be fully realised to ensure maximum impact and benefit for pupils in the classroom. The lack of clarity about pedagogy is also highlighted by Ofsted (2013), where an enquiry-based pedagogy is promoted in the best practice section of the report. However, there is no clear way forward for Church of England schools in terms of how they work this out in a Christian context. The focus of many enquiry-based approaches is on meaning-making which sits within a constructivist framework. This compounds the confusion over the purpose of the subject for Church of England schools and how this is translated into appropriate pedagogy. Both clear purpose **and** appropriate pedagogy are required for there to be effective practice in the classroom. In Chapter Two, I review the current literature specifically relating to purpose and pedagogy for RE in relation to Church of England schools, to seek further understanding of the context within which the pedagogical principles I create will be used.

### **1.3.3 The appropriateness (or not) of using certain pedagogies in Church of England schools because of the philosophies of education that lie behind them**

Whichever pedagogical approach is examined it is evident that assumptions about education and religion are inevitably involved. This means that approaches are culturally laden with particular philosophical and psychological theories. Although there may be much for the religious educator in a Church of England school to learn from these approaches, sometimes the values and beliefs underpinning them at best sit awkwardly and at worst are in direct conflict with Christian beliefs. The values and principles that lie behind some pedagogies appear to undermine the truth claims of religion, or see religion as function rather than revelation (revealed truth).

If one adopts Grimmitt's (2000) view of pedagogy, then it encompasses a theory of teaching and learning comprising aims, curriculum content and methodology. This raises significant questions for a Church of England school working within a secular framework concerning:

- Whose truth claims or concepts are being understood?
- Whose understanding of a particular faith is being presented?
- Are distorted views of religion and belief constructed within the classroom?
- Is the presentation of a religion authentic and is it ever possible to have an authentic view?
- What is the purpose of RE?

Thus, religious educators in Church of England schools are faced with specific challenges. This may lead in some cases to misrepresentation of religion, e.g. through stereotypes, a superficial engagement with learning from religion, and only seeing the world through one's own cultural lens. For example, superficial engagement with religion and belief was highlighted in the *Ofsted: Realising the potential* report (2013). Some educators, such as Cooling (1994) and Wright (2003), have sought to build pedagogies based on Christian theology which sit well within a Church school context. However, these approaches have limitations because they are not always transferable to other religions or worldviews (i.e Concept Cracking approach), because the pedagogical principles have not been

worked out adequately in classroom practice (i.e. critical realism) or are too generic and not specific to religious education and potentially exclusive (i.e. What if Learning).

I have therefore established that there are serious limitations and weaknesses with current pedagogical approaches to RE. I have also shown that understanding the purpose of RE is essential if effective pedagogy is to be employed. It is for this reason that in Chapter Two I review the literature relating to the purpose of RE in Church of England schools.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review: The purpose of religious education in Church of England schools**

As outlined in the previous chapter, the importance of clarifying the purpose of RE lies at the heart of developing any new pedagogical principles. This chapter seeks to understand the varying views within the Church of England on this issue and to outline the proposal for the rest of the thesis.

### **2.1 A summary of the legal position of RE in Church of England Schools**

The 1988 Education Act set out the legal requirements for Church of England schools. This was reinforced in subsequent Education Acts. The following is a summary of these Education Acts in my own words:

Voluntary Controlled schools: RE must be taught according to the locally agreed syllabus adopted by the local authority by which the school is maintained. However, a parent may request that their child undertakes RE according to the trust deed of the school and governors must make provision for this.

Voluntary Aided schools (and subsequently all academies and free schools): RE is determined by the governors and in accordance with the trust deed of the school or funding agreement. However, if parents wish their child to receive RE according to the agreed syllabus then provision must be made for this.

Provision is made in law for the inspection of RE in voluntary aided schools and academies under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. RE in voluntary controlled schools is inspected as part of Ofsted's cycle of inspections (Section 5 Education Act 2005)

In reality, Church of England schools and academies often follow their locally agreed syllabus. For example, the Diocese of Ely suggests all its schools and academies use the Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus (Diocese of Ely, 2018). This is largely because Church of England representatives sit on the agreed syllabus conferences which develop and revise the syllabuses in each local authority. Some Dioceses such as Chelmsford and Guildford provide a Diocesan syllabus for their voluntary aided schools (Chelmsford Diocese Board of Education, 2005; Diocese of Guildford,

2015). In the Diocese of Norwich where some of my paid work is based, it is recommended that all schools follow the locally agreed syllabus, including voluntary aided schools and academies.

## **2.1 Background to the nature and purpose of religious education in church schools**

The Church of England places Church schools at the centre of its mission (The Way Ahead, 2001, p.2). This notion is based on a Resolution of the General Synod in 1998 which challenged the Church of England to view Church schools alongside parish churches as at the heart of its mission to the nation (ibid., 2001, p.2). This Resolution should be set within the historical context of why the Church created schools in large numbers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The aim at that time was to offer basic education to the poor at a time when the state did not provide this. A number of documents in the last 20 years have sought to re-establish this aim, as the Church of England reviewed and reconsidered its mission and consolidated it, within a changing educational landscape. This is an essential contextual aspect of my research. Therefore, I analysed these documents and drew conclusions from them in terms of the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools as conceived by these publications.

Firstly, *The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium*<sup>5</sup> (2001) report provided a vision as education entered a new phase. This report particularly focused on schools being inclusive but distinctive and stressed the importance of church-school partnerships in meeting the needs of the local community. The purposes of both witness and service were strengthened. In particular, the report stated that the purpose of education in Church schools,

is to offer a spiritual dimension to the lives of young people, within the tradition of the Church of England, in an increasingly secular world.

(The Way Ahead, 2001, p.3)

This statement proposes a specific educational purpose which is defined in counter-cultural terms. By this I mean that the education in Church schools is to be different, and set apart, from education in other types of school.

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<sup>5</sup> From this point onwards I refer to this report as *The Way Ahead*.



More specifically, the report sets out the mission of the Church as:

- to proclaim the gospel.
- to nourish Christians in their faith.
- to bring others into faith.
- to nurture and maintain the dignity of the image of God in human beings through service, speaking out on important issues and to work for social justice as part of that mission.

(The Way Ahead, 2001, p.11)

This statement stresses the importance of the evangelistic nature of mission through its emphasis on the gospel message, proclaiming it to others and bringing people to faith. It is evident in the report that the aim of Church schools is to provide opportunities for children and their families to be able to have a basis for *choice* (my italics) about Christian commitment, but where there is no *expectation* (my italics) of commitment (The Way Ahead, 2001, p.12).

In terms of RE, the report emphasised its importance in terms of quality provision and giving particular weight to the Christian faith. The links between RE and collective worship were more explicit, as the report stated that collective worship should act as an expression of what is taught in many RE lessons. This phrase suggested that RE in Church schools was to be more than an academic subject. The close alignment of RE and collective worship indicates that the former should impact on the latter. This also argues that RE has a function in terms of faith development and supporting worship. This suggests an interpretation of the subject based on the 1944 Education Act where RE was regarded as both collective worship **and** religious instruction. However, as already noted, this distinction was changed for all schools in the 1988 Education Act. As outlined previously, in this Education Act RE was no longer defined as collective worship and religious instruction. Rather, RE was a distinct academic subject, even if it was based on the trust deed of a voluntary aided school. It was now legally separated from collective worship. This suggests a contradiction in *The Way Ahead* (2001) report about the purpose of RE in Church schools post-1988. The understanding of RE in this report aligns it more with religious instruction (in terms of the 1944 Act). This means that within the context of

the mission of the Church the purpose of RE became ambiguous because it was closer to faith formation than the legal framework suggested. This has had an impact on schools since 2001.

In 2010, the *Going for Growth: Transformation for Children, Young People and the Church*<sup>6</sup> report set out a rationale and programme for Christian nurture of children and young people. It issued a call at national, diocesan and parochial levels for action based on key premises that apply equally to children of the faith, of other faiths and of no faith. These included:

- Work towards every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ.

(Going for Growth, 2010, p.11)

- Bring about transformation, both in the Church and in the world, and recognise and enable the capacity of children and young people to be agents of change both for themselves and for others.

(Going for Growth, 2010, pp.12-13)

The primary aim of education in the broadest sense in Church of England schools according to these sources was to bring about change. Education was to provide a basis for young people to be able to make an informed choice about the Christian faith; it was about mission. The work of transformation, according to the statements above, was to be at the heart of the school ethos so that children encountered Jesus, bringing about change in their own lives and in the lives of others. This meant far more than children 'learning about' or 'learning from' the teachings of Jesus.

The word 'encounter' in the first statement above is an interesting choice. The Oxford English Dictionary definition says an encounter is 'to meet by chance or unexpectedly'. It is also a word often used in terms of contending with a difficulty, or coming up against an enemy. The word 'encounter' has its roots in Old French (c.1300) *encontre*, meaning 'meeting of adversaries or confrontation'. This in turn has its roots in the Late Latin *incontra* 'in front of'. The first recorded English use of the term was in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>6</sup> From the point onwards I refer to this report as *Going for Growth*.

where it had a weakened sense of 'meeting casually or unexpectedly' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). In psychology, the term is applied to a form of therapy where direct emotional confrontations are encouraged amongst participants to help resolve conflict. It was developed particularly in the 1960s to encourage group members to be completely honest and open, particularly through the work of Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1974). The aim of such encounter groups was to lead to individual growth and change (Lloyd, 1987). The term, 'encounter', therefore implies some form of active engagement with others, not a passive acceptance. So if one applies these notions of encounter to the statement above, pupils are to actively engage, grow spiritually and emotionally, and be transformed. This is to take place specifically through an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ through their education (not just RE) in a Church of England school.

This view of education suggests it is rooted in an incarnational theology. By this I mean the belief that Christians are to function as Jesus Christ to humanity and represent the incarnated Word of God to all people. In education settings, this means members of the school community, i.e. teachers and church leaders, being the presence of Jesus in schools. Foster, an academic and Christian author, maintains that being incarnational means living a life which makes present and visible the realm of the invisible Spirit (Foster, 1998, p.272). This means that the Church school is a place where the invisible Spirit is made manifest through its life and work. The Church school is to be a place where Christ dwells. Furthermore, Iselin and Meteyard maintain that an incarnational stance means imitating and embodying Christ in education (2010, pp.33-46). This position may sit well with Christian teachers in a school, as a strong sense of personal identity pervades their work and allows them to have an impact on the Christian ethos. However, for non-Christian teachers working within a church school, this position is potentially problematic. This reflects my concern about the 'What if Learning' pedagogical approach in Chapter One. A non-Christian may be sympathetic to the Christian ethos of the school, but they may not regard themselves as being the embodiment of Christ in the everyday. If education is viewed as an expression of the incarnation tradition, then the place of RE is further confused. RE within a Church school would appear to be one subject within the broader aims of education focusing on change and transformation. *Going for Growth* (2010) does not

expand on the purpose of RE specifically, so the statement from *The Way Ahead* report (2001) still stands at this point. However, *Going for Growth* (2010) adds a further layer of complexity to an understanding of the purpose and place of RE in the church school. In particular, it narrows the focus of education more specifically towards a personal encounter with Jesus.

It is significant that little research has been undertaken to explore the relationship between these two Church of England reports and the outworking of them in practice in schools. Jelfs (2010, 2013), a researcher from the University of Bristol, is one of very few academics to have investigated the relationship, focusing specifically on how Christian distinctiveness is understood in Church of England schools. She uses a framework developed by Benne (2001) based on three components of relationship between educational institutions and their founding religious tradition. These are vision, ethos, and people who bear the vision and ethos, i.e. the leaders. Jelfs (2013) begins by showing how *The Way Ahead* (2001) report focused on distinctiveness in terms of provision for RE and high moral aspirations in schools, but did not tackle distinctiveness in terms of teaching, learning and the curriculum. She claims that neither a clear purpose for RE in Church of England schools nor an appropriate pedagogy was put forward in the report. The focus was only on the importance of the subject and provision (Jelfs, 2013, p.54). Jelfs (2013) maintains that this may be partly due to the fact that Church schools had become increasingly unclear of their role in society from the 1960s onwards so the focus was on distinctiveness rather than teaching, learning and curriculum.

Jelfs undertook a small-scale piece of qualitative research in one Church of England diocese. This comprised a survey of 45 Church of England schools, together with three ethnographic case studies in three primary schools and one joint Roman Catholic-Church of England secondary school. There was an almost equal balance of voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools. Jelf's research indicated that the Christian faith was taken seriously by school leaders and was central to how they understood the purpose of their schools (2013, p.59). In addition, those who worked in Church schools in her study sought to model a Christian way of life, and I would argue that this illustrates an incarnational approach

(2013, p.60). Jelfs highlights the following as particularly strong elements in terms of a distinctive vision: Christ's message of love and care for others; appreciation of children as made in the image of God; and valuing and realising the potential of the whole person. This supports the view that *The Way Ahead* (2001) report focused on promoting Christian distinctiveness.

In relation to RE explicitly, the comments from participants in the study say much about how RE in a Church school is understood by teachers (2013, p.63). There was a strong relationship between the Christian character of the school and RE. Two teachers spoke of RE being 'very Christian' or teaching Christianity in a didactic way. However, Jelfs does not indicate how many other teachers in her study understood the teaching of Christianity in this way. There was also an indication that some Christian teachers drew on their personal faith to teach about Christianity (2013 p.63). The contribution of clergy to RE lessons was also welcomed by teachers in the case studies, as a way of promoting the Christian ethos (2013, p.65). These examples, although small in number, indicate a view of RE that is more in line with the 1944 Education Act; that is, religious instruction.

Jelfs indicates that one of the issues arising from the study is the lack of integration between faith and learning. Whilst distinctiveness is understood in terms of vision and ethos, it is less well understood in terms of curriculum and learning. This, Jelfs argues, has led to dualism. By this she means that the Christian faith is an 'add on' to the learning that takes place in a school. In terms of RE, this would support my reading of both *The Way Ahead* (2001) and *Going for Growth* (2010) reports, which indicate that the Church of England did not grapple with the purpose of RE in terms of distinctiveness, but only its importance. The case studies indicated that the importance of RE was largely regarded in terms of promoting a particular moral stance (Jelfs, 2013, p.63). Thus, as philosophies and pedagogies of RE developed in the 1960s onwards largely within a secular context, the Church of England did not engage with these questions and purely stressed RE's importance, especially in terms of morality, leaving the purpose of the subject to become problematic.

Jelfs concludes her case study report by calling on the Church of England to develop a philosophy of education that can withstand external changes

and priorities. She also suggests that the Church of England should promote pedagogical practices which emphasise pupil participation in a search for meaning and purpose which she claims will lead to wisdom; by this she means integrating wise knowing and living. She does not comment on the place of RE, or on what a distinctive RE might look like beyond promoting a moral stance or being 'more Christian' in its content. The outcomes of her case study for RE are therefore limited as she does not consider how the subject is related to the distinctive Christian ethos. However, the notion of wisdom is an area I build upon later in my thesis as I try to take forward Jelfs' notion of a distinctively Christian approach to RE, but one which is inclusive of all and is more than simply developing morality.

The Church of England has responded, whether intentionally or not, to Jelfs' recommendations with regard to development of a philosophy of education. In July 2016, a new vision for education in Church of England schools was launched. *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* (2016) sets out a philosophy for education based on the notion of educating for life in all its fullness (2016, p.8). There are four elements running through this vision: educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills; educating for hope and aspiration; educating for community and living well together; and educating for dignity and respect. This document moves away from the term 'distinctively' Christian as used in the *Way Ahead* (2001) report to 'deeply' Christian. This adds a further dimension to an already complex context for understanding the purpose of RE in a Church of England school. I have used a diagram (Figure 2) to illustrate this.

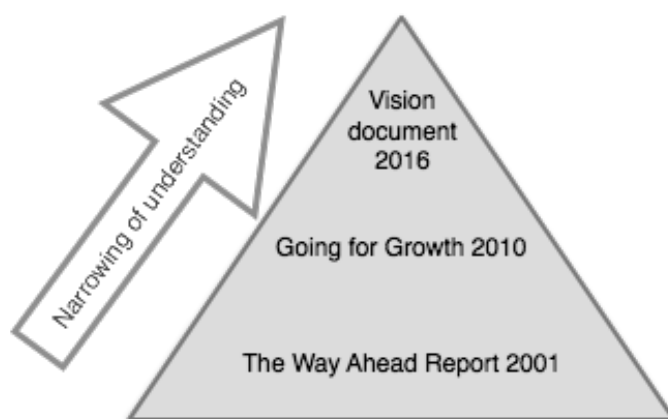


Figure 2: A diagram illustrating the narrowing of understanding of education within the Church of England (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

Figure 2 illustrates the narrowing of understanding of education within the Church of England. In particular, education is to be viewed as 'deeply' Christian rather than 'distinctively' Christian (Church of England, 2016). This is echoed in the schedule for Section 48 inspections (Church of England, 2013) where more emphasis was placed on the theological underpinning of a Church of England education, compared to previous schedules.

However, the place and purpose of RE are not specifically referred to in relation to this new vision. The focus is on character, leadership and living a good life. Although teaching, learning and the curriculum are mentioned, there is no specific reference to RE or to pedagogy. This means that at the current time schools are left to work this out for themselves. This in turn means that the issues identified by Jelfs (2013) are likely to continue.

## **2.2 The National Society Statement of Entitlement (2011)<sup>7</sup>**

The renewed focus on mission, and the emphasis on the importance of RE, were more specifically applied to Church of England school religious education in a *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2011). This statement in its introduction indicates that the mission imperative as outlined in *The Way Ahead* (Church of England, 2001) and *Going for Growth* (Church of England, 2010) reports is fundamental to the work of church schools. Following from this, the aims for RE in a Church schools are set out:

- To enable pupils to encounter Christianity as the religion that shaped British culture and heritage and influences the lives of millions of people today.
- To enable pupils to learn about the other major religions, their impact on culture and politics, art and history, and on the lives of their adherents.
- To develop understanding of religious faith as the search for and expression of truth.
- To contribute to the development of pupils' own spiritual / philosophical convictions, exploring and enriching their own faith and

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<sup>7</sup> From this point on I refer to this document as the *Statement of Entitlement*.

beliefs.

(Church of England, 2011, p.1)

If these aims are read within the context of mission (i.e. Church of England reports: *The Way Ahead*, 2001; *Going for Growth*, 2010), they may be interpreted very differently than if they are read in isolation. Within the context of mission, these aims may be read in terms of transformation. The young person is to be changed, in terms of their faith, as a result of their learning in RE. The young person's spiritual development would appear to be paramount, particularly in terms of their own search for truth and enriching of their own beliefs. The focus on truth, enrichment and the separation of Christianity from other world religions suggests that a faith nurture approach to pedagogy is being supported. This approach places RE at the heart of a school's mission, and in many ways is a continuation of the religious instruction post-1944. The context of these aims is essential to understanding them and how they will be interpreted by teachers. It is possible that the statement was left intentionally ambiguous, but this has left some teachers confused about what they are doing in RE (see for example, Church of England report, *Making a Difference?* 2014).

In addition, children are to *encounter* (my italics) Christianity, but *learn about* (my italics) other major religions. Taking into account my analysis of the term 'encounter' earlier in this chapter, it suggests in this context a real engagement with Christianity, and the person and teachings of Jesus more specifically, which can lead to transformation. This implies something more than 'learning about'. Also, there is a sense that the 'unexpected' and challenging aspects of the Christian faith are to be welcomed whereas other religions are simply to be 'learnt about'. There is an indication that an encounter may have unplanned outcomes, or lead to new and diverse thinking. This again is very different from the term 'learn about'. 'Learning about' suggests an activity where pupils acquire knowledge through studying rather than experiencing. There is also a sense of distance from the object of learning, whereas in an encounter a closeness with the subject is suggested. Therefore, within the context of mission, this aim of RE implies that an encounter with Christianity is more than a study of it. It suggests that within RE this learning can be transforming and life-changing.



However, if the *Statement of Entitlement* (2011) aims and subsequent outcomes are **not** read within the context of mission, then a very different understanding and possible conclusions may be drawn. For example, the *Statement of Entitlement* (2011) states that the outcomes for pupils at the end of their education in Church schools are that they are able to:

- Think theologically and explore ultimate questions.
- Reflect critically on the truth claims of Christian belief.
- Develop the skills to analyse, interpret and apply the Bible text.
- Recognise that faith is a particular way of understanding and responding to God and the world.
- Analyse and explain the varied nature and traditions of the Christian community.
- Make a well-informed response to Christianity.
- Respect those of all faiths in their search for God.
- Reflect critically on areas of shared belief and practice between different faiths.
- Enrich and expand their understanding of truth.
- Reflect critically and express their views on the human quest and destiny.

(Church of England, 2011, p.2)

These outcomes are primarily about RE as an academic subject, not about transformation. The outcomes suggest a robust pedagogical approach to the teaching of RE, which focuses on enquiry-based learning and higher-order thinking skills. These outcomes would seem to concur with the wider expectations of RE as outlined in many local agreed syllabuses which were based on the *Non-Statutory National Framework* (QCA, 2004). However, the aims and wider context of this statement show there is internal contradiction and the outcomes do not necessarily match the aims. This means teachers may be confused about what they are doing in the classroom.

To summarise, the *Statement of Entitlement* (2011) has caused confusion about the purpose of the subject, by making very clear statements about academic outcomes, yet holding these in tension with the primary purpose

of mission in Church of England schools without explaining how these two function together. In Chapter One I showed how the purpose of RE and pedagogical approaches are intrinsically linked. Therefore, if the purpose is unclear in the *Statement of Entitlement* (2011), then the pedagogical approaches will also be confused and unclear. One of the reasons for this is that *The Way Ahead* (2001) document had not fully grasped the nature of RE in schools post-1988. The view of this report was that of 1944, i.e. about religious instruction. I suggest, therefore, that this has caused confusion in the classroom. Teachers, advisers and other stakeholders, such as the clergy, have understood the aims contained in the *Statement of Entitlement* (2011) in different ways. This has led to a lack of clarity about the purpose. This claim is supported by two further Church of England reports, *The Church Schools of the Future* (Church of England, 2012) and *Making a Difference?* (Church of England, 2014).

### **2.3 The Church Schools of the Future (2012) report**

In 2012, *The Church Schools of the Future* report said,

High-quality religious education (RE) and collective worship should continue to make major contributions to the Church school's Christian ethos, to allow pupils to engage seriously with and develop an understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

(Church of England, 2012, p. 3)

In this statement, RE becomes almost synonymous with collective worship as per the 1944 Act. Simply by placing the two aspects of education alongside each other, the report suggests that they have the same fundamental purpose, i.e. primarily being about understanding the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. In addition, it is not clear what the phrase, 'a major contribution to the school's Christian ethos', means. This might mean RE contributes to an understanding of the Christian values of the school, yet it could also mean that pupils are taught about specific Christian teachings and the importance of these within the church school context, e.g. the purpose of the Eucharist, or the Trinitarian Godhead. The link with collective worship in this sentence is unhelpful in understanding the purpose of RE, as it suggests that the two aspects of school life are entwined, when in reality (and legally since 1988) they have different

purposes. This includes voluntary aided schools where, although the RE is provided in accordance with the trust deed, it is legally separated from collective worship.

This lack of clarity is further seen in an online statement made by the Church of England Chief Education Officer, Revd Nigel Genders:

The Church of England continues to be committed to the provision of high quality RE in schools which is vital for a balanced understanding of the world today where more than 80% of the population are people of faith. The Church strongly supports the statutory requirement for collective worship in all schools and there is plenty of flexibility in the provision to enable all pupils to benefit without compromising their faith or lack of it. Where there are real objections it is a parent's right to withdraw their child from worship, and the very few who take up that right demonstrates that schools have found exciting and creative ways of using collective worship to further children's spiritual and moral development. There is no expectation of commitment and the exposure to the range of religious traditions encourages community cohesion.

(Genders, 15 June 2015)

Here Genders refers to RE and collective worship in an interchangeable way. The statement begins by referring to RE, then moves on to a discussion around collective worship, yet ends with a sentence that can only relate to RE (Church of England schools have wholly Christian worship). The use of the term 'exposure' suggests that religious traditions other than Christianity are something to be viewed and observed, and not engaged with. However, the way that collective worship and RE are indistinguishable in this text adds to the confusion about purpose. This is not something new, and it is not something unique to the Church of England. For example, despite the separation of RE and collective worship in the 1988 Act, Circular 1/94 which provides non-statutory guidance on collective worship and RE for all schools (the guidance on RE was updated in 2010) opens with the words,

All maintained schools must provide religious education and daily collective worship for all registered pupils and promote their spiritual, moral and cultural development.

(Department for Education, Circular 1/94, 1994, p.1)

Whilst the guidance in the document does separate RE and collective worship in terms of their aims, the fact that the two are put together and directly connected at the beginning of the publication has added to confusion over the last two decades. The relationship between the two has not been clearly defined or articulated. For Church schools this is a particular problem which has been exacerbated by the layers of reports between 2001 and 2016, each aiming to clarify the overall purpose of education within a Christian context, but not grappling with how RE fits within this. This is even more crucial where RE in voluntary aided schools is to be taught according to the trust deed (Education Act, 1944 s.28 (1) (a)).

#### **2.4 Making a Difference? (2014) report**

It is no wonder then that pedagogical approaches and curriculum design in Church schools are confused since a fundamental understanding of the purpose of the subject is unclear. This lack of clarity was highlighted in the *Making a Difference? Report* (Church of England, 2014) published by the Church of England. This report was the result of a rigorous survey of 30 Church of England secondary and 30 primary schools between January and March 2014. The survey indicated that Church schools saw RE as essential to their distinctiveness (Church of England, 2014, p.7). This suggests that the focus on Christian distinctiveness as put forward by *The Way Ahead* (Church of England, 2001) report was well established in schools, and supports the small case study findings of Jelfs (2013). It demonstrates that the *importance* (my italics) of RE had been stressed, but not how the subject was to be understood in a Church of England context. The report states that teaching and learning, particularly in primary schools, varied significantly because of the lack of clarity about the underlying purpose of the subject in a Church school setting (Church of England, 2014, p.7).

In particular, the report notes that teachers confused developing pupils' moral awareness with the educational goals of the subject (ibid., 2014, p.13). This shows how the emphasis in *The Way Ahead* (Church of England, 2001) between RE and moral development has been misconstrued. It also demonstrates how the emphasis on the teachings of

Jesus (e.g. how to live a Christian life) has led to an emphasis on moral development. The report states that where the quality of RE was most effective in primary schools the core purpose of the subject was understood as developing pupils' religious literacy (Church of England, 2014, p.22). However, the report does not clarify what it means by the term 'religious literacy', and in subsequent months this was not addressed or articulated by the Church of England. The focus after the report was to develop a pedagogy and curriculum to support the teaching of Christianity. This project, *Understanding Christianity*, was launched in May 2016 and, whilst seeking to address the effectiveness of teaching Christianity, did not pursue the question of purpose and the wider RE curriculum. This confirmed for me the importance of establishing a clear purpose for the subject within the context of the Church of England's mission, before establishing new pedagogical principles.

## **2.5 Further evidence to support the confusion of purpose of RE in Church of England schools**

Prior to this Church of England review, the Ofsted Report: *Realising the potential* (2013), although mainly examining RE in community schools, did include some Church of England voluntary controlled schools as part of its inspection cycle (Education Act, 2005, Section 5) and this too showed significant lack of clarity about the purpose of the subject.

The teaching of RE in primary schools was not good enough because of weaknesses in teachers' understanding of the subject, a lack of emphasis on subject knowledge, poor and fragmented curriculum planning, very weak assessment, ineffective monitoring and teachers' limited access to effective training.

(Ofsted: *Realising the potential*, 2013, p.5)

The current survey found further evidence of teachers' confusion about what they were trying to achieve in RE and how to translate this into effective planning, teaching and assessment. In many of the schools visited, the subject was increasingly losing touch with the idea that RE should be primarily concerned with helping pupils to make sense of the world of religion and belief.

(Ofsted: Realising the potential, 2013, p.14)

The report went on to exemplify ways in which this lack of understanding of purpose was evident in classroom practice. This included confusion with spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and a focus on introspective learning about the pupils' own experiences rather than on investigating the meaning and purpose of religion and belief for adherents. Voluntary controlled Church schools in particular have a complex path to follow, as they legally have to follow the locally agreed syllabus yet have to maintain integrity with their Christian ethos. For example, the local agreed syllabus for Norfolk (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012), which all voluntary controlled schools in the Diocese of Norwich have to follow (except those in Suffolk Local Authority) states,

Religious Education should:

- provoke challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, what is right and wrong, the nature of reality and the being of God.
- develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious beliefs and worldviews that offer answers to such questions.
- develop pupils' awareness and understanding of religious beliefs, teachings, practices, forms of expression and the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.
- encourage pupils to learn from the diversity of religions, religious beliefs and worldviews while affirming their own faith or search for meaning.
- challenge pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their responses.

- encourage pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging and enable them to flourish individually within their own communities, and as citizens in a plural society and the global community.
- help prepare pupils for adult life and employment by enabling them to develop respect and sensitivity to others - in particular those with different faiths and beliefs - and equipping them to combat prejudice and negative discrimination.

(Norfolk Local Authority, 2012, p.3)

There are similarities between the aims of RE stated here and the outcomes in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2011); there is a focus on Christianity, a focus on questioning and exploration of faith and belief, and on the skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation. However, there is also an emphasis on the value of RE in terms of employability, community cohesion and citizenship. These aims add another layer of complexity to an already confusing picture.

In October 2013, *A Review of Religious Education in England* was published by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC). As part of this review a new Non-Statutory National Curriculum Framework for RE was set out. Whilst aimed primarily at local authorities and academy chains who were involved in the creation of agreed syllabuses, the document was endorsed by the Church of England as a member of the REC. In addition, Church of England representatives who sit on local agreed syllabus conferences may make use of this document in their discussion and work with schools. This means that, even implicitly, the Church of England is endorsing the purpose statement laid out in this document.

The purpose statement said:

Religious education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education in schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human. In RE they learn about and from religions and worldviews in local, national and global contexts, to discover, explore and consider different answers to

these questions. They learn to weigh up the value of wisdom from different sources, to develop and express their insights in response, and to agree or disagree respectfully. Teaching therefore should equip pupils with systematic knowledge and understanding of a range of religions and worldviews, enabling them to develop their ideas, values and identities. It should develop in pupils an aptitude for dialogue so that they can participate positively in our society with its diverse religions and worldviews. Pupils should gain and deploy the skills needed to understand, interpret and evaluate texts, sources of wisdom and authority and other evidence. They learn to articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ.

(REC, 2013, p.14)

The statement suggests a stronger focus on skills and systematic understanding of religion and belief as well as a focus on dialogue and the contribution of RE to life in modern Britain. This purpose statement is then developed through three aims. These aims relate to: knowledge and understanding of religions and worldviews; expressing ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and world views; and gaining and deploying the skills needed to engage with religions and world views (ibid., 2013, pp.14-15). These aims have been used by some local authorities when devising new agreed syllabuses, curriculums for RE and assessment (for example, the Sheffield Agreed Syllabus, 2014). These statements have also had an impact on pedagogy. In this latest purpose statement, there is a move away from the language of 'learning about' and 'learning from religion', which had dominated the purpose and aims of RE, and to some extent pedagogy for the previous 20 years.

This purpose statement and the three aims which accompany it continue to add to the confusion about the purpose of RE. The Church of England, as a member of the REC, has endorsed the document, and voluntary controlled schools currently have to follow an agreed syllabus which is likely to use this purpose statement. It would indicate that this is another attempt to clarify the purpose of the subject but in reality it has added another layer of complexity. In particular, this statement does not take into account the Christian context of Church of England school RE or show how RE is to



contribute to the Christian character of the school.

## **2.6 A new Statement of Entitlement (2016)**

As I indicated in my introduction, education policy and practice do not stand still. During the writing-up stage of my thesis an updated *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) was released by the Church of England Education Office. This new *Statement of Entitlement* was partly a response to the *Making a Difference?* (Church of England, 2014) report and wider discussions about RE in the public sphere (e.g *A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools*, 2015: *RE for REal: The Future of Teaching and Learning about Religion and Belief*, 2015) along with requests from RE advisers in the field who wanted further clarification on the purpose of RE in Church of England schools. The opening statement maintains,

At the heart of religious education in church schools is the teaching of Christianity, rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is a clear expectation that as inclusive communities, church schools encourage learning about and learning from other religions and foster respect for other religions and world views.

(A Statement of Entitlement from the Church of England Education Office, 2016, p.1)

This statement, whilst not specifically referring to an encounter with Jesus Christ or the mission of the Church of England, does indicate that RE is to be rooted in the person and work of Jesus. This reflects previous documentation (*The Way Ahead*, 2001; *Going for Growth*, 2010) and brings it in line with the Church of England Vision Document (2016). However, the language is open to interpretation. Christianity is set apart as being the underpinning or 'root' of RE, and this language could appear exclusive. In addition, the use of the terms 'learning about' and 'learning from' draw on documents (*The Non-Statutory National Framework*, QCA, 2004) which are no longer in use by the majority of local authorities or dioceses. Reference to the *RE Review* (REC, 2013) is missing even though this document was endorsed by the Church of England. Furthermore, the continued link between Christian values and RE remains ambiguous,

Links with the Christian values of the school and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are intrinsic to the religious education

curriculum and should have a significant impact on learners.

(A Statement of Entitlement from the Church of England Education Office, 2016, p.1)

According to this statement Christian values are central to RE and should make a difference to pupils. This suggests that RE is particularly about promoting Christian values, and about transformation. Whilst not using the terminology of mission, it is implied in the phrasing used. A phrase which causes uncertainty in terms of the purpose of the subject is the reference to 'students and families' (ibid., 2016, paragraph 3, p.1) in relation to knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. This suggests that RE is to impact beyond the pupils themselves to their wider family, suggesting a missional aim. This reflects the *Church of England vision* (2016) statement relating to transformation and change.

The first page of the new statement therefore continues to contribute to the confusion about purpose. Whether there is genuine lack of understanding or a deliberate attempt to compromise in terms of bringing together a vast range of opinions about the purpose of RE (as highlighted in Chapter One) with the varied views within the Church of England as highlighted in this chapter, the result is the same. Teachers in the classroom without clear purpose will not know how to teach the subject effectively and this will inevitably lead to weaker outcomes for pupils (Church of England, 2014).

The aims in the new *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) are clearer than in the previous one, but still raise questions. In the 2016 document the aims of RE in Church schools are:

- To enable pupils to know about and understand Christianity as a living faith that influences the lives of people worldwide and as the religion that shapes British culture and heritage.
- To enable pupils to know and understand about other major world religions and world views, their impact on society, culture and the wider world enabling pupils to express ideas and insights
- To contribute to the development of pupils' own spiritual/philosophical convictions, exploring and enriching their own beliefs and worldviews

(Church of England, 2016, p.1-2)

The term 'encounter' is no longer used in this set of aims and has been replaced with 'know about and understand'. This applies both to Christianity as a lived religion and to other major world religions and worldviews. This has both positive and negative implications. As indicated above, the term 'encounter' implies more than simply learning about something, and suggests an engagement with the challenges of religious belief as well as a closeness. Losing this particular term suggests that pupils are less likely to experience, wrestle with and critique Christianity; they are simply to know about and understand. The phrase 'knowing about and understand' does not indicate a depth of learning or grappling with complex ideas and issues. However, an encounter implies gaining an understanding of beliefs from the 'inside' to really grasp them and engage with them. By 'from the inside' I mean listening to the voice of the believer, as one can never completely or truly understand the other as everyone will always have their own position. Nevertheless, one can approach understanding through empathy and openness where encountering means being immersed, looking from the inside out and experiencing the worldview of another. Later in the thesis I explore this in terms of an embrace (p.249).

It is possible the term 'encounter' was removed because of its links with the *Going for Growth* (Church of England, 2010) document in terms of mission. However, if this was the case it suggests an avoidance of the key issue which is about the purpose of the RE. Therefore, the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) does not explicitly address the relationship between Christian distinctiveness and the purpose of RE. In my proposition, I will argue it is possible to have an effective critical pedagogy within a missional context, and that the word 'encounter' is central to this.

However, a positive benefit of the new phrasing is the use of the same terminology when exploring both Christianity and other religions and worldviews. This suggests that Christianity is to be viewed alongside other faiths and beliefs in a similar way. I suggest that this decision was made to counter the view that RE is confessional in a Church school. However, this has only partially been achieved because Christianity is still separated from the others, and is the only one to be viewed as a living faith.

## 2.7 Conclusions

The purpose of RE in Church of England Schools is in a state of flux. Each document analysed in this chapter has been written as a response to changes in the wider educational and political landscape. However, the focus of each Church of England document (*The Way Ahead*, 2001; *Going for Growth*, 2010; *Church Schools of the Future*, 2012; *Church of England Vision Document*, 2016) has primarily been to re-establish Church schools as at the heart of the Church's mission. The focus on the use of the word 'transformation' shows that personal change is an expected outcome for a pupil attending a Church of England school. However, my analysis shows that, with regard to RE, the relationship between this subject and the wider missional aim is not well articulated and therefore not understood by teachers and other stakeholders (Church of England, 2014).

The reasons for this are:

- a lack of clarity about the position of RE within a broader context of the Church of England seeking to clarify its own position within the educational landscape and maintain 'mission' at its heart.
- a focus on the importance of RE in Church of England schools at the expense of establishing a clear purpose since *The Way Ahead* report (Church of England, 2001).
- the use of a range of different purpose statements from varying sources to create a 'mishmash' that lacks coherence.
- the varying influence of different pedagogical approaches over the last thirty years, often in different areas of the country (e.g. Living Difference uses an approach that is almost unique to Hampshire), which has led to a bewildering number of interpretations of RE that the teacher therefore cannot be expected to understand.

If teachers in Church of England schools are to understand what they are teaching and why, then the tension between the purpose of RE, and how it contributes to the Christian ethos of the school, and in particular how it sits within the wider mission of the Church, must be resolved. The review of different pedagogical approaches undertaken in Chapter One highlighted the relationship between purpose and pedagogy. Until a clear purpose for RE is defined, pedagogy will continue to be ineffective. In Chapter Two, the

revised aims and outcomes in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) provide a partial way forward as they clarify the purpose of RE in terms of religious literacy, i.e. knowledge and understanding of religion and beliefs. However, what this fails to do is resolve the relationship between RE and the mission of Church schools as set out in the new *Church of England Vision Document* (Church of England, 2016). Therefore, to move forward, the relationship between the two must be clearly articulated. Headteachers and teachers need a way of grasping the relationship between RE and the mission of Church schools that makes sense to them, and to other stakeholders such as parents and clergy.

## **2.8 A way forward**

In considering a way forward I use an analogy of 'rock strata' to explain the issues relating to purpose and pedagogy and then explain how the analogy of hospitality indicated the way forward for my thesis.

I have used this analogy of 'rock strata' previously in an online blog (Wright, 2016). The purpose statements, and the pedagogies which often connect with them, have formed layers. They now look a bit like rock strata. If one looks at rock strata, there are some smooth lines, some more prominent than others, all layered on top of each other, but in places a bit broken or mixed up. It is unclear where one layer begins and another ends. Like these rock strata, purposes and pedagogies for RE have become layered, broken and mixed up. It is not clear on what basis some pedagogies are founded and others practised. These layers or pedagogies in some cases do not sit easily with one another, and some appear to be contradictory. In order to move forward, this bewildering layering of purpose and pedagogy needs to be understood, and then challenged. To continue the analogy, some kind of earthquake is required to break up the pedagogical approaches of the past and begin again with new foundations. This thesis aims to be an earthquake. It takes a new approach to creating pedagogical principles for Church of England schools based specifically on theology, yet provides a more inclusive approach than that of Cooling (1994, 2013).

I stumbled across a potential way forward for understanding both the purpose of RE and a pedagogical framework by accident. In his paper, *Doing God in Education* (2010), Cooling highlights the work of St Ethelburga's Church in the City of London, where he suggests they provide

a distinctive faith culture that is inclusive (Cooling, 2010, p.66). I was reading this document as part of my wider professional life, it was not something I began reading with my research in mind. However, as I read one particular section, it occurred to me that using analogies relating to hospitality may be helpful in understanding the relationship between RE and the Christian ethos and focus on mission in Church of England schools.

The inclusive space at St Ethelburga's is referred to as a 'tent of meeting' and Cooling suggests this may be a useful metaphor for the distinctive Christian ethos of a church school. The 'tent of meeting', he asserts, provides a 'safe space for authentic dialogue'; where guests sit in a circle, seek refreshment and companionship (ibid., p.66). The space can be described as liminal, mutual, and safe, a harmonious space where people can meet as equals (St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, 2017). As I read this I began to consider whether this analogy might be useful not only for understanding the Christian ethos in Church of England schools, but also understanding the place of RE within this ethos. It raised questions about whether this analogy could inform an understanding of RE in Church of England schools, within a pluralistic and changing society; whether narrative and story-telling approaches advocated by St Ethelburga's could provide a way forward for pedagogy within RE in church schools; and whether a particular theological interpretation of hospitality may lead to specific pedagogical principles.

I was aware that the 'What if Learning' project (2013) developed by Cooling (2010) and his colleague David Smith (2009) and which I have referred to in Chapter One, used a theology of hospitality as one of its founding principles. Before I proceeded further I read Smith's seminal work *Learning from a Stranger* (2009) to establish whether a theology of hospitality had already been linked to Christian distinctiveness and RE. My analysis of Smith's work is outlined in depth in Chapter Five, however at this early stage I was able to determine that a theology of hospitality had not been directly used in terms of either exploring the relationship between RE and the mission of Church of England schools, nor had it been used to underpin pedagogical principles for RE. Smith had used a theology of hospitality in relation to the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages, but had not applied this more widely.

My hypothesis at this stage was that a theology of hospitality could provide a way of:

- understanding the missional context of Church of England schools and RE's place and purpose within this, and
- thereby enabling clear and coherent pedagogical principles for teaching and learning in RE to be established in a Church of England schools.

Therefore, having identified the issues in Chapter One and Two through my literature review, I developed a proposition drawing on a theology of hospitality through theological-philosophical enquiry which I then refined through an empirical study. In Chapter Three I explain the methodology and methods used in order to undertake this research.

## **Chapter 3. My Research Process**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I describe and explain the methodology employed in my research. This was an emerging methodology as my research questions were refined after I had completed my literature review and as new avenues for the research presented themselves to me. Since the thesis is proposing principles and theory based on a theology of hospitality this determined a qualitative study which was philosophical and theological in nature, underpinned by a hermeneutical approach. It was theological because it investigated the key ideas surrounding hospitality in biblical texts, tradition and experience. It examined the ways in which these ideas changed over time and through history. It considered the relationship between different concepts and beliefs, and how a theology of hospitality has impacted on Christians through history and in the present day. It was philosophical because reasoning and asking questions were fundamental to the research process. The research examined the coherence and construction of arguments, and considered ontological questions relating to a theology of hospitality. The theological and philosophical are intertwined throughout the research. The principles and theory were then explored and refined through an empirical component gaining teachers' perspectives and views on my emerging theory.

### **3.2 My Methodology**

The methodology used in this research was a hermeneutical theological-philosophical enquiry (Figure 3), with an empirical component. In this chapter I will:

- explain how the theological-philosophical enquiry is dependent upon a hermeneutical approach.
- explain the importance of bringing the theological-philosophical and empirical together.
- explain the methods: analysis of biblical sources, analysis of conceptual literature, active contemplation and a focus group.
- explore my role in the research process.



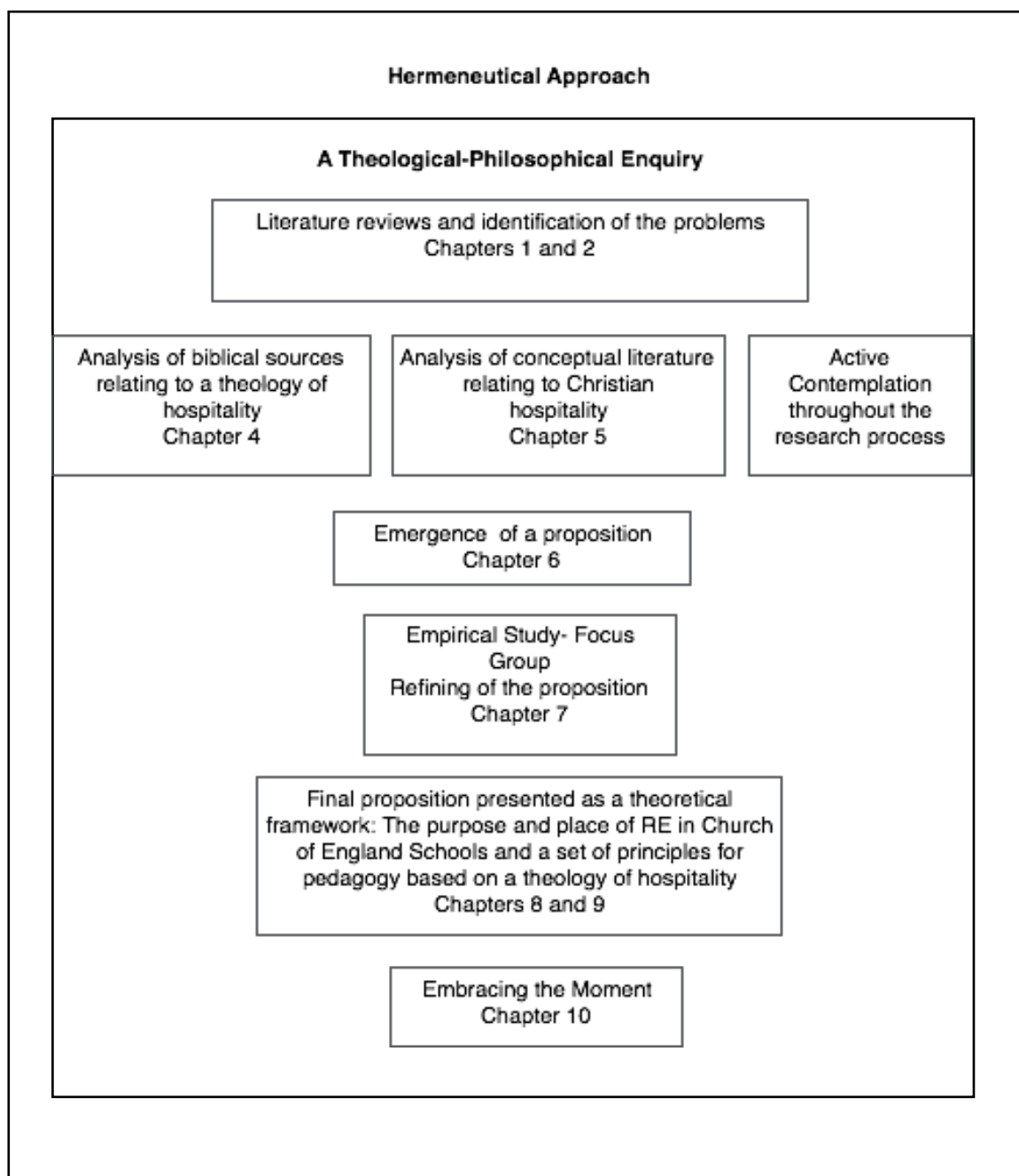


Figure 3: The research design

### 3.2.1 An outline of my research design

The research design was a three-stage hermeneutical movement. This was a cyclical approach where layers of interpretation developed my understanding throughout the research process. It began by identifying problems relating to purpose and pedagogy in Church of England schools. It then moved to a preliminary proposition for understanding the purpose and place of RE, and then developed a set of pedagogical principles based on a theology of hospitality. These stages were theological and

philosophical in nature. This initial proposition was then refined through an empirical component - a focus group study. This enabled teachers' voices to be heard and enabled me to refine my proposition. Through this listening process, my understanding was deepened. This enabled me to develop my final proposition which sets out an understanding of the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools and puts forward a set of principles on which to base pedagogy. The thesis is a theoretical framework for the teaching of RE in Church of England schools. Figure 3 summarises the research design.

### **3.2.2 Using a hermeneutical methodology**

Hermeneutics underpinned the whole methodology. I was drawn to a hermeneutic approach for the following reasons:

- the entire research process was cyclical in nature. The aim was to build understanding through a process of interpretation.
- hermeneutics has its roots in theology. My enquiry involved theological ideas, and interpretation and analysis of biblical texts.
- there is an emphasis in hermeneutics on listening with openness to form understanding (Thiselton, 2009, p.7) which appeals to me both professionally (i.e. it connects with the RE enquiry process that I am used to) and personally (i.e. listening to others and learning from them is important to me).
- hermeneutics suited the range of texts that I planned to use. I have used the term 'text' to refer to written documentation such as the bible, books, journals, curriculum guidance, conference papers, but also images. A hermeneutical approach values the use of images, art and poetry as part of the process of interpretation.
- the way in which I used a focus group was hermeneutical in nature. The focus group was primarily about developing further understanding through conversation and dialogue.

### **3.2.3 The appropriateness of hermeneutics for my research**

The word 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek *hermeneuein* which means to utter, explain or translate (Zimmermann, 2015, p.3). From its earliest

use, it has been associated with understanding spoken or written communication; it is about interpretation.

Initially hermeneutics was associated with religious writings and has its roots in biblical exegesis. Seeking after wisdom was the primary aim of pre-modern philosophers, rather than a quest for truth. This understanding of an intrinsic relationship between the mind and the world was challenged post-Descartes (1596-1650) and Kant (1724-1804). This had implications for the field of hermeneutics. Firstly, objective knowledge was regarded as unbiased and value-free, and secondly the interpreter was faced with trying to bridge the gulf between her mind and that of the author of the text she was reading (Zimmermann, 2015, p.23).

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the relationship of a text to its historical and cultural context became more prominent. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was the first to define hermeneutics as the art of understanding (Thiselton, 2009, p.149). By this he meant gaining understanding through a systematic interpretative process which was cyclical in nature. There was always a movement between the part and the whole. The emphasis was on understanding (or *Verstehen*), but this was kept in critical check by explanation (*Erklärung*). There was a dialogue and engagement between the text and the researcher leading to understanding. This meant that understanding was more intuitive and experiential. In my own research, there was an ongoing rhythm of questions and answers as I engaged initially with the texts, and then later with the focus-group dialogue. This allowed the principles for pedagogy to emerge and be continually shaped by my engagement with texts and through the empirical study.

Schleiermacher's work also placed value on provisional or pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*). Each piece of understanding was based on a provisional understanding of what the 'text' was about (Thiselton, 2009, p.155). In terms of my own research I had to have some idea that a theology of hospitality might provide a way forward for considering both the purpose of RE in a Church of England school and pedagogical principles, but did not know how I would frame this or what the principles would be. The thesis shows that some ideas needed to be revisited as different readings of the same text took place and as new interpretations were explored. I developed a preliminary proposition and then reworked and

reframed it. Some texts were read and re-read in order to ask different questions and seek deeper meaning. This provided a robustness in terms of the final principles developed. Aldridge (2015, p.1) summarises this by saying the hermeneutical process is cyclical because the current conception of our approach must guide our interpretation of the part, but the concept itself is revisable in light of what the parts tell us. The interpretation therefore authenticates itself as new pieces of evidence are analysed and contribute to the whole. This shows that the understanding of the whole is aided by the understanding of the parts, and vice versa. Thiselton uses a very helpful analogy of putting together a jigsaw to explain this process.

Piece by piece we begin to build a picture as some initial guesses or judgements are proved wrong and others retained as promising and probably right.

(Thiselton, 2009, p.13)

As I have read texts they have contributed to my understanding of a theology of hospitality and how this may provide principles for pedagogy. However, my broadening understanding of theology and pedagogy over the last seven years through the research process has also had a bearing on my interpretation of the texts. The hermeneutic circle (or spiral) allows the parts once integrated to form the whole, but each part is also understood in relation to the whole. Thus, to refer back to the jigsaw analogy (Thiselton, 2009), the jigsaw is a whole, **and** the sum of many parts. The whole, only makes sense with all the parts, but the parts only make sense by being part of the whole. Each text I have read has been in relationship to others and in relationship with the research questions. In many ways, it has been like putting a jigsaw together.

Heidegger (1889-1976) argued that to be human is to interpret. This has led to modern hermeneutics asserting two key principles. Firstly, that pre-understanding is essential to interpretation, and secondly that the reason we can engage with the world meaningfully is because we are temporal, historical beings (Zimmerman, 2015, p.38). In terms of my role as a researcher Heidegger's ideas are important because they acknowledge that the researcher comes from a certain perspective, but also that the whole of life is about interpreting. Thus, I am continually interpreting my

world, including what I understand by hospitality in relation to RE. It is a continual process of interpretation and therefore this thesis is where I am now in terms of my interpretation.

Lastly, for Gadamer (1900-2002) mediation is at the heart of the hermeneutic experience (Zimmermann, 2015, p.47). By mediation Gadamer means that as we encounter new things we integrate or interpret them into our experience in order to understand them. This was the approach I took to my research. As I encountered new insights into a theology of hospitality whether they were biblical texts, conceptual literature, images or conversations in the focus group, I made sense of them within the context of my research and my own viewpoint, thus developing my understanding.

### **3.2.4 A hermeneutical methodology and my research design**

Here I outline the benefits of using a hermeneutical approach to underpin my research design.

- The hermeneutical process implies movement. I have used the term 'movement' to describe the stages of the research process because there is a cyclical layering of interpretation to create a proposition. The term movement suggests fluidity and an openness to continual modification. My research was a movement within and between the theological-philosophical and the empirical.
- The hermeneutical process values the range of communications (i.e. biblical text, conceptual literature, images, conversation) used in the research. Since the research enquiry was largely philosophical and theological in its nature, the evidence to be analysed was primarily biblical text and conceptual literature. Most of the texts I used were not written for an RE context. For example, on the one hand some were written for Christian communities, and on the other hand some were written for higher education. It was important to ask a range of questions about each text, and using a hermeneutical approach brought benefits to the interpretative process. The hermeneutical approach asked questions relating to the historical, cultural, contextual, syntactical, theological, literary and philosophical (Thiselton, 2009, p.1). In addition, the use of images for active contemplation and inclusion of an empirical study were

rooted in a hermeneutical approach, as they encouraged dialogue with the subject matter. Zimmerman argues that art possesses the power to convey true knowledge about the human condition (2015, p.54). The artist's creation is itself an act of interpretation, a hermeneutical response to an aspect of human reality. Thus, images provided another layer of interpretation since they offered different meanings, particularly of biblical text (see for example, Chapter Four).

- The hermeneutical process supported an open and partial, even contestable conclusion. This did not mean my conclusions and final principles were tenuous, but rather that they were not rigid. Understanding in a hermeneutical sense is a process or journey, and in terms of my thesis the journey has not ended, the path remains open. The analogy of roads and paths is used by Heidegger (2011, cited in Aldridge, 2015, p.3) to suggest that the different paths lead to new insights, and that the destination is not determined. This approach has allowed for some paradoxes to remain in the final proposition.
- The hermeneutical process is not one that can be undertaken as a neutral observer (Thiselton, 2009, p.8). We are participants in understanding, and therefore cannot be neutral. As someone who has a personal Christian faith and works within the RE professional community, it was important that the methodology acknowledged my perspectives. I interpreted and brought my understanding to a text through my own worldview, whilst trying to remain open (Aldridge, 2015, p.4). Gadamer (1989) used a metaphor to describe the hermeneutic process - the interpreter's 'horizon' is not replaced by that of the object of study, but is a dialogical process in which the two horizons are fused together (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2014). In this sense, Gadamer suggests that there is an objective reality, but that it is always filtered through our minds.

The understanding, in a hermeneutical sense, was an evolving and messy process; a movement. Interpretations changed as I interacted with the biblical texts, conceptual literature and images and as I listened to the dialogue of the focus group.

### **3.2.5 A Theological-Philosophical Enquiry, with an empirical component**

My hermeneutical methodology brings together the theological-philosophical and empirical in order to effectively answer the two research questions. Aware of the criticisms levelled at Jackson (1997, 2004) and Wright (2003) that their theory lacked practical application to the classroom, I set out to ensure that the research design was rooted in the theological and philosophical, but refined through an empirical study. The process was not a linear one. For example, the refining of the preliminary proposition through the empirical study meant that I revisited biblical sources and explored different conceptual literature as I created the final theoretical framework. This was a hermeneutical process and cyclical in nature.

As stated previously, using a range of communications - written and oral - is supported strongly by a hermeneutical approach. Wilson and Santoro (2015) document nine projects where philosophy was pursued through empirical research. The aim was to show the distinctively philosophical tenets of empirical enquiry conducted by philosophers of education (2015, p.123). One of these projects is particularly significant in terms of understanding the methodology used in my research. Golding (2015) writes about the value of bringing the philosophical and empirical together. He maintains that empirical research gathers and analyses data, whereas philosophical research constructs concepts, theories and arguments to resolve conceptual problems (Golding, 2015, p.206). Golding argues that most research involves both, but that they are not actively brought together in an effective way. For example, 'what is teaching?' is a conceptual question best approached through philosophical research, much like my own research question. However, this question cannot be answered without drawing on empirical evidence of teaching (Golding, 2015, p.206). Thus, my own research questions which relate to the purpose of RE and pedagogy are trying to resolve a conceptual problem. By rooting my research in a hermeneutical methodology I have approached my questions primarily through theological and philosophical enquiry, but used an empirical study to gather teachers' views through discussion of aspects of my theory.

Golding (2015) and Mejia (2008) argue that there is a potential equilibrium

where research is at the same time both philosophical and empirical. This means that we form philosophical conclusions about an issue and then through empirical research we adjust our philosophical conclusions. My research has followed this pattern, as I have used empirical research to hone my preliminary proposition. Golding (2015, pp.2010-2015) maintains that using a Community of Enquiry (a form of Socratic Dialogue) is one way of ensuring effective partnership between the two aspects of the research. Although not strictly following a Community of Enquiry structure as set out by Lipman (2003), the work with my focus group was influenced by many of the principles of this approach.

My methodology has enabled the interweaving of theological and philosophical ideas with an empirical study which has refined and ensured the pedagogical principles can be applied to the classroom. This has enabled me to limit the kind of criticism levelled at Jackson (1997, 2004) and Wright (2003).

### **3.3 An analysis of biblical sources and enquiry into theological ideas**

Here I outline how my use of biblical material reflects a hermeneutical methodology. I have made choices in terms of the biblical texts I focused on in this part of the enquiry which are explained in detail in Chapter Four. The texts were chosen on the basis of their links to the Christian concept of hospitality, in order that theological ideas could be interpreted and applied to my research questions. I began with texts that were well known, but then used concordances to establish other texts that may be appropriate for analysis. In many cases reading biblical texts and commentaries about them then led to other texts and documentary evidence, thus building up layers of interpretation. I am aware that others may interpret the chosen texts differently because of their own worldview. My choice of text, alongside my interpretation, is not neutral. However, I have been open to texts which may contradict or challenge my hypothesis and allowed these to inform my thinking.

Central to my hermeneutical enquiry into theological ideas using biblical material was a conversation with the text. As I kept returning to the text the interpretation developed and a deeper level of understanding was forged. Some texts were revisited a number of times as new perspectives came into view through reading of other biblical texts, conceptual literature or



through the empirical study. The interpretations have evolved and been strengthened through this critical process. As I read the texts I was trying to gain an understanding of the meaning for those who created the text, i.e. within their context. In addition, I was aware of the varying interpretations that people through history have placed on different biblical sources and that by choosing to read certain commentaries or articles I was gaining only a small range of views from the vast number available. Texts therefore presented different readings, and created layers of interpretation. This has meant that neat conclusions have not always been possible.

### **3.4 An analysis of conceptual literature relating to a theology of hospitality**

Alongside biblical texts, I undertook an analysis of conceptual literature about a theology of hospitality. It was important to look at a broad and balanced selection of sources in order that I did not just select documents that supported my theory. My choice of documents was based on two criteria which I explain in detail in Chapter Five. However, I provide a summary here and explain how the method was hermeneutical in nature. The two criteria for selecting conceptual literature were:

- to broaden and deepen my understanding of a Christian theology of hospitality.
- to develop my understanding of the use of a Christian theology of hospitality in education beyond the subject of RE.

The initial selection of material was based on works referenced by Cooling (2010) and Smith (2009) as they had already referred to and used a theology of hospitality in an educational context. One source led to another organically within the context of the two criteria stated above. I am aware, therefore, that some literature may have been missed. Nevertheless, the conceptual literature was selected specifically to allow a proposition to emerge that would be appropriate for Church of England schools and understandable by teachers.

The method at this stage of my research process was rooted in a problem-orientated approach (Duffy, 2010, p.125). I analysed what was written about the theology of hospitality and how this might apply to the purpose

and place of RE and related pedagogy. This involved a process of interpretation in order to seek understanding and draw out key themes. I often summarised, trying to capture the essence and meaning of what each text was saying. I then evaluated the importance of these ideas in relation to my two research questions. One important aspect was seeing the inter-relationship between different sources and arising themes. This process allowed a proposition to emerge organically. However, the sources themselves also raised further questions, thus reflecting the hermeneutical process and a more source-orientated approach (ibid., 2010, p.125). This again demonstrates the cyclical nature of the research process.

As with the biblical text, conversation with the documentary evidence has allowed questions and theory to emerge, which have then informed further selection of source material. In constructing my thesis based on the theology of hospitality, the sources I have were not necessarily produced for the attention of future researchers. They were produced for many different audiences and for a variety of settings. In many cases, they were not written for an educational context and nor do they relate to RE specifically. Since the documents have been written with various audiences in mind, and for differing purposes, it was important to be fully aware of bias and the intention of the authors. Some documents were rooted in personal experience (e.g. Homan and Pratt, 2007) rather than scholarship, and this had a bearing on the inferences that I could draw from them. I have therefore reinterpreted and applied theory in these documents to a new context, i.e. the context of RE in Church of England schools.

### **3.5 Active Contemplation**

Professor of Humanities, Jens Zimmermann, states,

Art helps us understand ourselves better and thus make more intelligent decisions about life. Art helps us to identify and understand previously invisible forces that shape our lives and thus deal with them. In what is perhaps its greatest gift to us, art makes possible recognition, the power allowing us to say, 'Yes, that's how it is, now I understand.'

(Zimmerman, 2015, pp.55-56)

As stated above, art (including painting, sculpture, symbol) is valued by

hermeneutic philosophers as a way of developing understanding and also in terms of making oneself understood. The active contemplations in my research served to both aid understanding (Chapters Four and Five) and make myself understood (Chapter Nine). I explain in more detail here why this method was chosen to form a distinct part of the hermeneutical enquiry.

The work of Kolb (1983) is well known and suggests that individuals tend towards different learning styles. Although many have critiqued learning style analysis (Smith, 2001), I know that I learn more effectively through certain forms of enquiry than others. For example, my tendency towards visual-spatial thinking means that images and pictorial representations of concepts and ideas communicate theory to me. Therefore, I come from both an ontological and an epistemological position where I value the expression and representation of the social world through the visual as well as through written and verbal language (Mason, 2002, pp.106-7). For me written text and words alone would not enable me to gain a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of a theology of hospitality. Therefore, I sought a method which would enable me to use analogies, metaphors and images in helping to answer my two research questions.

Image-based methods can help us access more elusive, hard-to-put-into-words aspects of our research. This was particularly important in terms of helping to clarify the relationship between RE and the Christian mission of Church of England schools. Klenke (2008) has written extensively on the value of image-based research within a leadership context. She shows how image-based research is in many ways similar to traditional text-based qualitative research in that it combines intuition, subjectivity and objectivity leading to insight and understanding. However, she highlights the unique way in which an image-based approach draws on a multi-sensory interpretation where cognitive, emotional and spiritual ways of knowing are exercised. A Christian theology of hospitality by nature lends itself to symbolism, metaphor and analogy (i.e. embrace, setting a table) and therefore this more reflective, visual-based method allowed for a richer interpretation of the theology. Weber (2008) writes about the use of image in research. She maintains that images have the ability to convey multiple messages, to pose questions and to suggest abstract and concrete ideas. Thus, an image-based method fits well with a hermeneutical methodology

as it supports emerging understanding and layers of interpretation.

The particular image-based method I have used requires a process of active contemplation; where an image is considered and an intellectual decision made about it. This method is expounded in an adult education setting by Jarvis (1995) as a form of reflective learning, and in my research this took place within a theological context. As I looked at an image in active contemplation I asked: What does this say or what is it about? What does this mean? How does this apply to my understanding of Christian hospitality? These were hermeneutical questions and led to an intellectual understanding of the image in relation to my research questions. However, this method also enabled personal reflections and responses to arise. I brought my emotional and psychological self to the images and this is reflected in my understanding. I also acknowledge that my interpretations may not be the ones intended by the artists themselves. These different forms of understanding are entwined in my active contemplations, and, reflected in the thesis.

The function of these active contemplations as a method was primarily to help stimulate creative and original thinking, and secondly to aid understanding. This enabled a more holistic approach, drawing on my visual sense to provide a more complete and rounded picture of a Christian theology of hospitality. Use of images allowed me to see things differently, to realise new interpretations and to deepen understanding. The selection of images was initiated through dialogue with other texts, and primarily focused on the notions of hospitality and embrace. When images were referred to in texts I then used them for active contemplations. For example, some written texts (e.g. Chester, 2011) referred to a painting, which then became a focus for active contemplation. In other cases, I deliberately sought out images, particularly of biblical narratives, to seek deeper layers of understanding. All images used were in the public domain or were my own personal photographs so that copyright was not infringed. The images used are listed in Appendix One and are also referenced at the end of each vignette, but except for my own photographs are not pictured to ensure copyright is not breached.

Within the thesis, these active contemplations are presented as vignettes, illustrating points, confirming theory or suggesting new meanings. The use

of vignettes in social science research is well attested (Hughes and Huby, 2004), although using them in the way I have done in my thesis is unusual. However, the purpose of capturing values and perceptions in the reality of the moment is the essentially the same. They are used within autoethnography to increase self-reflexivity (Humphreys, 2005), and my approach is similar to this. They serve to give the reader insights into my thought process and allow them to enter into the hermeneutical process which I have undertaken. The vignettes may be described as my unedited thoughts at the moment of contemplation. The process of active contemplation was also used within the empirical study which I explain in Chapter Seven.

The analysis of biblical material, documents and the active contemplations formed the theological and philosophical aspects of my hermeneutical enquiry.

### **3.6 Establishing a focus group**

The focus group was set up to evaluate the proposition created and to generate ideas which would inform the final pedagogical principles. The focus group was a distinct and important part of the hermeneutical approach as it enabled me to refine and revise my interpretations and tentative understandings based on the theological and philosophical aspects of my enquiry.

The use of focus groups is growing in educational research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.436). A focus group is a small number of people who are unrelated but come together for a common interest. The group has a specific topic for discussion, and the facilitator aims to create a non-threatening, open environment in which people can talk freely. Participants are actively encouraged to respond to each other's ideas, as well as those of the facilitator or moderator. In my own research, the aim was not to generalise, but to gain insights and perceptions relating to my emerging proposition. The group needed to be large enough to allow for diversity (in terms of teaching experience, type of school, gender), but small enough to allow for active participation by all. Ensuring diversity was challenging as there are a disproportionate number of female RE coordinators. As a result, I was required to ask specifically for some male

participants. I was also aware that the age of the participants and the length of service may also have an impact on their willingness to engage with the questions, as well as what they said.

In defining a focus group, Morgan (1997) suggests an inclusive approach be taken. He defines it as a group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. It is the researcher's interest which determines the focus, and the data comes from the group interaction. Since I was using a focus group as a sounding board, I am not using the term 'data' to refer to the outcomes from the sessions. Instead, I use the term 'conclusions' to refer to the outcomes of the sessions in terms of emerging themes, understanding and interpretations which impacted on my final principles.

Focus groups are characterised by the interaction between participants and the facilitator, as well as between the participants themselves, in order to develop understanding and to generate ideas and insights. The focus group is an approach blending techniques from group process theory and qualitative research. It is 'focused' because the group is meeting with a defined purpose and objective.

A focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.

(Krueger and Casey, 2009, p.1)

It can be noted that this method fits well within a hermeneutical methodology since it allows for listening and dialogue which is open, and enables diverse layers of interpretation. My reflections after each focus group meeting enabled a depth and complexity of understanding to emerge. This again demonstrates the cyclical nature of the research process.

### **3.7 Group membership of my focus group**

Freeman (2006) maintains that whilst there is agreement about the form and function of focus groups, there is diversity in terms of what is meant by

good practice. The primary reason for these differences, according to Freeman, is the epistemological assumptions made by researchers. It was important for me, therefore to reflect critically on my own assumptions as part of the hermeneutical process. Kitzinger (1994) and Krueger (1994) are two pre-eminent authors on the application of focus groups, but they both come from different epistemological stances according to Freeman (2006). This means that in terms of good practice they have different views on group membership, group composition, interaction and transferability of results. Freeman states that Kitzinger approaches her work from a constructivist perspective, whereas Krueger takes a realist stand. I will take the key elements of a focus group and explain my chosen approach for each.

Like Krueger (1994), it was important for me not to use a pre-existing group. Whilst this may have been easier, e.g. using a local RE network group, it was important to ensure that the group was diverse in its make-up, and that views and opinions were not clouded by previous relationships and interactions. By creating a new group, the dynamics were not pre-set, and could be established together. However, to some degree the approach I took could be seen as convenience sampling, of which Krueger is critical. His reasoning is that this compromises the external validity of the outcomes, as he is interested in developing abstracts. However, I was more interested in a variety of conclusions being generated which would shape the overall outcome of my research. Therefore, my approach sat within the good practice that Kitzinger (1994) advocates.

### **3.8 Focus Group Composition**

The aim of the focus group was to provide interpretation and meaning. The aim was not to draw out generalisations that needed to be triangulated or validated, which is a concern of Krueger (1994), rather the focus was on understanding the teachers' views in relation to the purpose of RE and related pedagogy as put forward in my hypothesis. Krueger (1994) argues for robust external validity so that results can be transferable to the population from which the groups were drawn. This was never the intention of my focus group, since the opinions and insights were sought primarily to critique the hypothesis, not to use the contributions to generalise about

teacher views in relation to my proposed pedagogical framework. In this instance, therefore, my approach fits more closely with the thinking of Kitzinger (1995) where she states that focus groups are at their best when rich constructions offer useful conceptual insights. Therefore, the participants were selected because of their interest in the field of enquiry and their knowledge about pedagogy in RE. This ensured that the conclusions had value and were authentic.

Although Kitzinger (1994) is not concerned with external validity, she still maintains that the group must ensure a representative range of opinions. In relation to my research, since some of my participants knew each other previously through training and networks, and hold similar RE coordinator positions in their schools, this created a sense of homogeneity which is important to Krueger (1994). However, the diversity of schools and ages of the participants also sought to ensure a sense of diversity within the group, which is of concern to Kitzinger (1994). Nevertheless, the scope of the focus group was limited and this has been acknowledged in the conclusions. There are limitations in the direct application of the research, particularly for example in secondary schools which did not form part of the focus group study. In addition, the diversity of the focus group was lacking because no male participants were able to take part due to time constraints or work commitments. However, neither of these two limitations in themselves hinders the validity of the focus group because no generalisations are being made since the primary purpose was gathering of opinion to inform my own hypothesis.

Whilst there must be criteria for the formation of focus groups (Morgan, 1997) in relation to the make-up of groups, interview structure, number of participants and number of groups, these are not prescriptive. It was important to consider who would best serve the purpose of my research and also who was available within the timescales. Having a smaller group was first regarded as a disadvantage, however in practice this allowed for more depth of response which served the purposes of the research well. In many ways, the approach to my own focus group was pragmatic, taking into account the availability of teachers and the questions to be asked. The nature of the setting and the constraints on time have all had an impact on group



formation. However, the underlying hermeneutical methodology has enabled me to use the focus group effectively to gather ideas and perspectives, to form conclusions and identify emerging themes. The focus group has therefore been an essential element of the research process.

### **3.9 Advantages of using a focus group**

The general advantages of focus groups within educational research have been exemplified by Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996, p.14). These include the opportunity for genuine and spontaneous responses, the snowballing of ideas between participants, and the importance of the interaction of participants with the subject matter and each other. All these elements were essential for my hermeneutical approach. In my particular research the focus group also provided a means of probing the teachers' emotional reactions and attitudes to the hypothesis (Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, 1996, p.5). It was important to gather a range of views, and the aim was not to build a consensus or theory, but to obtain perspectives and a critique of my hypothesis (ibid., p.5). Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) specifically highlight the value of focus groups when used for conducting my kind of exploratory research as they enable genuine information about what each person feels to be shared, rather than presenting group conformity. Indeed, diversity of opinion was desired (ibid., p.15).

The group setting was preferable to individual interviews, because it allowed me to put into practice some of the pedagogical principles I had identified and also allowed me to take advantage of group interactions. In some senses, the principles of pedagogy in my preliminary proposition were employed during the focus group process. For example, the creation of space within the focus group meetings was based on the principles set out in Chapter Six. This meant that not only did the participants interact with the draft hypothesis through discussion and debate, but also experienced the hypothesis itself, and therefore were able to comment on it from an experiential point of view. The group interaction also allowed me to gain direct evidence on similarities and differences of thought as the teachers disagreed or agreed with one another.

Using a focus group meant I could ask questions for clarification and probe for a deeper understanding. I gauged non-verbal responses through facial expression and body language. My focus group used open-ended and relatively broad questions and led to qualitative data with depth and meaning. Participants revealed multiple perspectives even on the same issue, and this was an important element in refining the principles of pedagogy. This was because the questions were open to interpretation, allowing individuals to engage and interact with the questions and seek clarification from not only myself as researcher and facilitator, but also from one another as participants. This meant that both individual and collective responses could be analysed and interpreted. In addition, connections could be made between different respondent responses, and the group allowed for complexity of response and contradiction from within the group, which is more difficult to ascertain in a survey. On a practical level, the focus group allowed me to gather the views of five participants in a short period of time.

### **3.10 Disadvantages of using a focus group**

A focus group is largely dependent on the participants who take part, and this led to some particular issues with my research. No male participants were able to attend the focus group session. Although one male teacher did express a keen interest, his school was unable to release him at the time agreed. This meant that in the focus group respondents were all female, which although to some extent is representative of the teaching population and particularly of the gender of RE co-ordinators in primary schools (from my experience as a professional in the field), it is not fully representative.

In addition, as the participants self-selected, an interest in the research topic and outcomes may have formed part of their decision to participate. There was no way of knowing what the outcome of the group would be - whether they would support or challenge the hypothesis. This made the analysis and identifying of themes more difficult as the results were somewhat chaotic. It was also important not to generalise the views of this very small sample. In addition, comments made by participants were articulated within the focus group context which had its own social, emotional and intellectual parameters and this may have had an impact on

the responses generated.

The fact that the focus group was driven by myself as researcher was also a disadvantage. I was aware of my expertise in the field of RE, and a possible attitude of 'wanting to please' amongst the participants because of my role as a local adviser. In the first session, I ensured that all participants felt able to share their ideas whether or not they were positive. I also stressed the importance of the research being in a stage of development and that the aim was for them to critique the preliminary proposition. I reiterated to them in each session that my role was to listen. Nevertheless, as Morgan (1997) intimates, the issue of the researcher driving the research is not unique to focus groups. In fact, he argues, all but the most unobtrusive social science methods would have similar issues. It is however heightened in my own case because of the relationship I have with the participants professionally, and also because of the nature of the hypothesis being linked to work that I am doing in schools. I was aware that the focus group element of the research must not make general claims, but focus solely on developing my own understanding as part of the hermeneutical process.

Group dynamics were very important. In focus groups one dominant participant can result in particular responses being made more strongly than others, whereas more reserved members of the group may feel that they have less opportunity to contribute. Morgan (1997) argues that the focus group facilitator will sometimes be challenged about whether to let the group gain control or whether to intervene and ensure the group is focused on the task. On some occasions, I did try to draw in the quieter member of the group. Whilst the group interactions were largely viewed as a strength in terms of developing a hypothesis, it was also a weakness. In such a small group the pressure of conforming to a particular idea or notion was present in some dialogue. However, this was balanced by the fact that the group dynamics allowed for a sense of safety and comfort so that the participants were able to disagree with one another, and not feel they had to conform to one view.

### **3.11 My role in the research process**

Acknowledgement of one's own perspective is a fundamental principle within a hermeneutical approach. Zimmermann states,

Knowledge is not something that we acquire and control as a possession but something in which we already participate. The reason we understand anything at all is because we already stand in it.

(Zimmermann, 2015, p.40)

Research into RE involves personal and professional views about both belief and education. It is therefore important to set out my role in the research process, as my own personal beliefs and professional outlook have impacted on the research outcomes.

My research has taken place over seven years. During this time, I have been self-employed as an RE advisor. My paid work has been primarily for the Diocese of Norwich, the Diocese of St Albans and Culham St Gabriel's Trust. When I began my research, I was also working for Norfolk Local Authority developing a new agreed syllabus (Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2012). My role as an RE advisor and particularly my understanding of enquiry have influenced my research methodology, and the methods I have used in order to answer my research questions.

The Norfolk Agreed Syllabus (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012), for which I provided consultancy, developed an enquiry process that was rooted in the work of Plato (Rowland, 2007), and has at its heart the Socratic method. The Socratic method is based on the principle of asking questions in order to lead to better understanding. Rowland (2007) contends that the term 'maietutic' is sometimes used to describe the Socratic method in which intrinsic wisdom is elicited through critical questioning. The Norfolk Agreed Syllabus enquiry approach draws on the Socratic method as it promotes critical questioning and dialogue. The approach also utilises the work of Hutchings (2006) and Kahn and Rourke (2004). Hutchings emphasises the importance of students' learning being self-directed and open-ended. Enquiry-based approaches in RE promote engagement with complex

issues, but allow for a variety of responses and conclusions. The line of enquiry may change or be re-negotiated through the process, and new methods employed in order to seek out new evidence (Kahn and Rouke, 2004, p.2). This particular approach to enquiry has influenced my methodology. My professional context means that I am not only well informed, but also proficient in using this particular form of enquiry. In many ways the hermeneutical approach was a natural continuation from my professional context to my research context, as the focus on questioning and dialogue was similar. In addition, the methods used were already ones in which I was skilled, or were comparable to those I was already using within my advisory work.

My own thinking about the purpose of RE and the place of RE within Church of England schools has also been rethought and reworked over the last seven years. This is partly due to my engagement with schools through my work as a Diocesan Adviser, as well as through my work as a survey team-member for the *Making a Difference?* (Church of England, 2014) report. In 2014-16, I worked with a small group of advisers to clarify my thinking on religious and theological literacy<sup>8</sup> (Chipperton et al., 2016), and this has had an impact on my understanding of the purpose of RE and its relationship to the Christian ethos. This has led me to ask new questions about the biblical and documentary sources, and also shaped some of the questions asked of the focus group. It has also shown me the increasing importance of my research for Church of England schools.

As my research has been conducted over seven years, the flexibility of this approach has enabled me to change course, to focus on new lines of enquiry and to remain focused on the research questions. The hermeneutical enquiry also allows for different ways of perceiving the world and is not concerned with seeking firm solutions, rather allowing them to emerge through dialogue. Thus, the enquiry process allowed for openness and freedom of interpretation (Kahn and Rouke, 2004). Through my enquiry I have become more aware of what I don't know and what I needed to know

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<sup>8</sup> Theological literacy refers to the ability to understand where beliefs come from, how beliefs have changed over time, how beliefs relate to each other and how beliefs shape the way believers see the world and each other (see for example, McGrath, 2011).

in order to develop a hypothesis. I have been on a path of discovery and seeking. I have journeyed to find both what I am looking for, and refined my ideas with teachers. This has led to some dead ends, and some new avenues, but the fundamental questions have remained the same.

Taking a hermeneutical approach means that I approach all texts, documents and images through a particular lens. It is therefore important for me to explain the lens through which I am seeing, and also to acknowledge bias that I may bring to my research. My own beliefs have their roots in a Christian conservative evangelical tradition and this has shaped my worldview. Throughout the research I have examined my own subjectivity carefully before forming interpretations, in order to maintain a critical approach. However, I acknowledge that my own worldview has contributed to my interpretation of texts and that others may interpret them differently. For example, this is particularly evident in my interpretation of biblical narratives such as the Last Supper where I regard the Eucharist as a commemoration rather than a miracle. My understanding of salvation, justification and the priesthood of all believers has shaped how I understand the notion of hospitality. This means that others may draw out different principles of pedagogy or view the purpose of RE differently even within the same context as myself. The focus group was one method that helped to scrutinise my own hypothesis, and to help identify particular bias or assumptions in my interpretations. In addition, the reading of texts by those from different Christian theological perspectives helped to broaden my interpretations.

### **3.12 Conclusions**

I have explained why a hermeneutical theological-philosophical enquiry with an empirical component was the most appropriate methodology for my research. I have shown how the methods I chose enabled me to most appropriately and effectively answer my research questions and develop my hypothesis. Lastly and most importantly, the pedagogical principles set out in my final hypothesis has been lived out through the research process. This was not something I set out to do at the beginning of the research process. However, as I have reflected on and analysed the ongoing research process it became clear to me that I had in fact embodied my pedagogical principles through the process. The biblical and documentary

analysis, alongside the focus group empirical study, enabled me to put into practice the principles I was hypothesising about during the research process. I have therefore 'lived out' the principles of the hypothesis through the research process itself. This means not only that the principles can be worked out in practice (albeit here in a research context), but also that they are effective and appropriate within the field of religious education.

## **Chapter 4. Analysis of biblical sources relating to a theology of hospitality**

### **4.1 Introduction**

As outlined in Chapter Two I suggest that a theology of hospitality may help in clarifying the purpose of RE and related pedagogy within Church of England schools. This chapter aims to explore the nature of hospitality itself as understood from a Christian perspective in order to help answer my two research questions:

- Can a theology of hospitality help us to understand the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools?
- In light of this understanding, can a theology of hospitality provide principles of pedagogy for RE in Church of England schools?

The primary source material being used here is the biblical narrative and I undertake a hermeneutical theological-philosophical enquiry into the nature of hospitality from a Christian perspective. I have chosen biblical passages in both the Old and New Testament which demonstrate the concept of hospitality. I actively contemplate on visual representations of some biblical narratives as well as interpret the biblical view of hospitality and consider how this might contribute to a pedagogical framework for RE in Church of England schools.

In this chapter I make reference to the work of Christine Pohl. Pohl is associate provost and professor of Christian social ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky. In my reading about hospitality and education, many scholars referred to Pohl as their starting point. It seemed important to turn to her writings and commentary on the biblical narrative as she has influenced other thinkers such as Smith (2009), York (2002), Sutherland (2006), and Homan and Pratt (2007) whose works I analyse in Chapter Five. Pohl (1999) argues that the Christian tradition has lost the art of true hospitality. She aims to restore hospitality as central to Christian identity, as a part of daily life. She writes from a Christian perspective for members of the Christian community, not for a research audience. In this chapter I have used some of her insights into biblical narratives relating to hospitality as a starting point for my own analysis. Pohl analyses a small



number of biblical texts and refers to others briefly as part of her discourse. I have expanded the number of biblical texts, to clarify in particular the notion of covenant love and to explore more deeply what the Old Testament narratives understand by hospitality. Therefore, I have used other commentaries, in addition to Pohl, to undertake my analysis. I have considered how Pohl has interpreted texts in a contemporary context and sought to apply this to my research questions. My own analysis is therefore woven into this chapter, but developed later in terms of specific pedagogical principles. At the end of each section I draw out themes that I use to develop my hypothesis.

In addition, this chapter is punctuated by active contemplations (Jarvis, 1995) on pieces of art which have something to say on the nature of hospitality from a biblical perspective. This means that through a process of active contemplation, I stimulate my own creative and original thinking. This is an important part of the hermeneutical process because it leads to a deeper understanding of the texts, as further interpretations and insights are brought to bear on the same passage using different visual stimulus. In addition, the artists' own hermeneutical analysis of biblical texts is evident through their visual representation of particular events. These are also therefore open to interpretation and analysis. This does not mean that my interpretations are necessarily those intended by the artists themselves. I have chosen pieces of art that are freely available to view via the internet, and which illustrate biblical passages I have referred to in my textual analysis. I have referenced the artwork in this thesis, but have not included the images themselves for copyright reasons.

#### **4.2 The nature of hospitality**

In order to consider the value of a Christian theology of hospitality in terms of a pedagogical framework, it is important to understand what I mean by the term 'hospitality'. This is particularly important as the use of the term hospitality has changed over time. Pohl (1999) maps the changing nature and understanding of hospitality through the centuries, suggesting that the heart of hospitality as understood in biblical times has been lost. The concept of hospitality arose in ancient times (Pohl, 1999). In nomadic cultures, a stranger would be given food and shelter as they travelled on their journey. It was an essential part of their journey, without which they

would not be sustained and renewed to continue their way. This view of hospitality had a moral dimension, where 'welcoming the stranger' lay at the heart (Pohl, 1999, pp. 4-5). Navone (2004, p.330), a Jesuit priest, theologian and philosopher, develops this further by suggesting that hospitality was a virtue and sacred duty. He maintains that hospitality was based on a sense of mutual obligation of people to help one another, based on a divine command. Hence, temples and shrines were common places for people to seek shelter (Navone, 2004, p.329).

However, today, the term hospitality has become synonymous with the hospitality industry and the concept of entertaining. The terms hospitality and catering have been combined in many settings including schools. For example, City and Guilds (City and Guilds, 2015) offer a range of qualifications where hospitality is specifically linked to catering, management and the service industry. The hospitality industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century includes a broad category of services including event planning, hotels, facility maintenance, visitor attractions, catering, transport and tourism (The Hospitality Guild, 2015). My observation, alongside that of Pohl (1999), is that this has meant hospitality today is often regarded as a service where something is expected in return whether that be payment or offering of reciprocal hospitality. Chester (2011) maintains that western cultures have commercialised hospitality. He suggests that in the past people would open their homes to people travelling, rather than hotels being the preferred place for a night; restaurants have replaced public eateries where all classes mixed together; eating alone has replaced the family meal around the table.

The following analysis, therefore, looks at biblical texts to draw out the fundamental principles of hospitality as understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition. I have drawn conclusions at the end of each section to show how my understanding has developed through analysing and reflecting on the biblical narrative through a hermeneutical process. I show how the biblical understanding of hospitality is complex and is sometimes paradoxical in nature. My final set of conclusions aims to bring together the different layers of interpretation to highlight themes that I use to create my pedagogical principles alongside the themes arising from the conceptual literature review in Chapter Five. The themes emerging through the biblical texts are:

- The importance of the covenant relationship.
- Encountering God's presence which leads to transformation.
- Meeting the needs of all.
- The conditional and unconditional nature of hospitality.
- The interplay of host and guest.

### **4.3 The Old Testament view of hospitality**

The Old Testament suggests that a biblical view of hospitality is connected to a recognition of God's lordship and the covenant relationship between the Israelites and their God. Pohl (1999) argues that the meta-narrative of the Old Testament is rooted in and shaped by the hospitality tradition. The Old Testament opens with an invitation from the 'host', 'God', to Adam and Eve to be guests in his garden (The Bible<sup>9</sup>, Genesis 2:8). From this starting point, hospitality is about relationship. This emphasis on relationship is developed throughout the Old Testament. My argument is rooted in Pohl's interpretation of the Old Testament narrative which suggests that the relationship between the host, 'God', and the guest, 'human beings' and more specifically the Israelites, is the thread which runs through its entirety.

This host-guest relationship is understood primarily in terms of a covenant relationship. Evidence of specific covenant relationships or alliances in the ancient Near Middle East is well attested (Fensham, 2009, p.235), so it is not unusual that the focus on this kind of relationship is advocated through the Old Testament. The Old Testament refers to the following forms of covenant relationship:

- The patriarchal or Abrahamic Covenant.
- The Sinai Covenant.
- The Davidic Covenant.

I will take each of these covenant relationships and reflect on how they demonstrate a host-guest relationship. This is important because the

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<sup>9</sup> I have referenced the Bible in this first instance, in all other in-text citations I refer only to the relevant book of the Bible, chapter and verse(s).

covenant relationship provides a lens through which hospitality in the biblical texts is understood.

#### **4.3.1 The Patriarchal Covenant**

The narrative accounts of the life of Noah (Genesis 6:1-11:32) include the first references to a covenant-type relationship (Genesis 6:18). Here the relationship is built on obligation and favour (Genesis 6:8-18) and in many ways is a prelude to the patriarchal covenant. In the case of Noah, the passage suggests that the covenant was dependent on him being obedient to God and building the ark. After the flood, God declares to Noah that the rainbow is to be a sign that he will never destroy the earth again with a flood (Genesis 9:2-17). The sign is referred to in such a way that it is a reminder primarily to God of his promise (Chalmers, 2009, p.210). So after the flood a promise is given and, unlike earlier in this narrative, it is unconditional and applies to all, not just to Noah. Therefore, from the very beginnings of the biblical narrative, there is a tension between the conditional and unconditional nature of the covenant relationship. Since this tension is one noted throughout the Old and New Testament, it is for this reason I have included reference to this particular covenant even though it has less to say in relation to the host-guest relationship.

The focus in many Christian theologies on the notion of salvation history has led to an emphasis on the Abrahamic covenant (Chalmers, 2009, p.208). God (or Yahweh) was referred to as 'The God of Abraham' throughout the Old Testament (Exodus 3:15). Abraham was also held in esteem in New Testament times, for example his faith is upheld in Hebrews 11:8-19. This patriarchal or Abrahamic covenant is established in Genesis Chapter 15 and 17, it does not supersede the covenant with Noah, but rather adds a different dimension or layer. Two promises are made to Abraham: multiplication of his offspring, and the inheritance of the Promised Land. The covenant was a contract. There were contractual responsibilities on both sides. Abraham had to give something - his loyalty and obedience - in return for protection, power and land. The sign of this covenant was the act of circumcision. There is a sense in this covenant of the renewed presence of God. It suggests that after The Fall of Adam and Eve, God is still present in the world. God shows that he wants to be in a relationship with people. Roberts (2002, p.54) suggests there is a repeated

refrain, 'I will be your God and you will be my people' throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Exodus 6:7, Jeremiah 11:4, Ezekiel 36:28). Roberts indicates that after Adam and Eve were cast out of God's presence (Genesis 3: 28) all appeared to be lost. However, the covenant relationship allows the Israelites to be in God's presence once again, so it provides a sense of hope to them.

The host-guest relationship as seen through a covenant is characterised by mutual responsibilities. The host (God) provides protection through his ongoing presence as well as physical territory (land), whilst the guest (Israelites) provides allegiance. However, although there is a sense of the conditional nature of hospitality, there is also a clear indication that it is also unconditional. I suggest that thinking of the covenants in a build-up of layers may be helpful. The Noahic covenant is a bottom layer and the Abraham covenant lies on top of this. The bottom layer is not lost, but remains. The Noahic covenant was universal and unconditional. Although God placed certain expectations on Noah, his descendants and all living things, there is no sense that God will withdraw his promise (Chalmers, 2009, p.210). In addition, Anderson (1990, p.94) says that this element remains within the Abraham covenant too. He refers to this as the everlasting covenant; that is, one that is not dependent on human performance. This is illustrated by the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, which was not dependent on any human actions, but was God's response to his people in need (Exodus 2:23-24). Therefore, the covenant is both conditional and unconditional; there is a paradox. This paradox has implications for how the concept of hospitality is understood throughout the Old Testament. Conditional hospitality indicates that the guest is required to meet certain conditions. This form of hospitality means that a host expresses approval of certain actions and rewards them. The host in many senses has power over those that she controls. Conditional hospitality therefore comes from a position of self-first, i.e. how does this benefit me. Unconditional hospitality implies there is nothing that can be done to earn it; it is freely and graciously given. It is not dependent on anything, and will be given even if conditions such as circumcision are not met. Both forms of hospitality are evident and held in tension throughout the Old Testament.

#### 4.3.2 The Sinai Covenant

The covenant established with Moses at Mount Sinai after the flight from Egypt (Exodus 19 -24) provides another layer on top of the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant does not subvert the former ones with Abraham or Noah, but may be seen as an additional dimension or layer which builds on these first ones. The sign of this covenant was the sabbath, a day of rest. The sabbath was to be one day in seven which was to be kept holy for God (Exodus 20: 8-11). Later, when referring to the giving of manna (Exodus 16:21-30), the Sabbath is regarded as a gift of God and a day of benefit and rest to the people (Bruce and Young, cited in Marshall, Millard, Packer, Wiseman, 2009, p.1032). However, the concept of hospitality is also apparent. In the description of the covenant rituals (Exodus 24), the hospitable nature of the covenant is encountered. In verse 11, Moses and the leaders of Israel are welcomed into God's presence to share a meal. God appears to the Israelite leaders in a theophany<sup>10</sup> (Exodus 24:11). Anderson (1990, p.93) claims that it is an unusual statement about eating and drinking with God, suggesting that during the covenant meal the presence of God was so real they had visions of God enthroned in his cosmic majesty. Anderson's interpretation suggests that in some sense God acts as the host and that the meal ratifies the covenant relationship. This assertion is supported by evidence from this period that sharing a meal and/or blood being shed was common practice when sealing a covenant (Anderson, 1990, p.93). For example, in the Mari tablets<sup>11</sup> (c.1750-1697 BCE) a treaty was consummated through the ritual killing of an ass. The covenant was given by God, and he could take it away. Therefore, the partners in the host-guest relationship are not equal. This suggests that there is some obligation on the Israelites; they are to keep the laws and be obedient, then they will benefit from God's hospitality.

This is shown in the accounts where God provides manna and quail in the wilderness (Exodus 16) and fresh water to drink (Exodus 17:1-7). In both these accounts, the metaphor of God as host is used. The writer of Exodus does not actually use the word 'host', but the Psalmist reflecting back on the Exodus narrative refers to God's actions as spreading a table in the

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<sup>10</sup> A theophany is an appearance of God to a person.

<sup>11</sup> The Mari Tablets are made of clay and were discovered in c.1933 along the Euphrates River.

wilderness (Psalm 78:19). In the account of the Manna from heaven, God responds to the Israelites' needs unconditionally, but also provides conditions for its consumption (Exodus 16: 4-5). The tension remains between the unconditional covenant as made to Noah, and to some degree Abraham (and later to David), and the Sinai Covenant which is specifically conditional (Anderson, 1990, p.94). However, the importance of the presence of God and God as 'host' are central to the covenant relationship which continues through the book of Exodus, as the Israelites are instructed to construct the tabernacle (Roberts, 2002, p.71). It is in this tabernacle that God will meet His people, He will host them in His presence. The people are His guests. In terms of hospitality, this means there is a continued tension between the conditional and unconditional.

#### **4.3.3 The Davidic Covenant**

The Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7), like the Abrahamic one, is of the promissory type (Fensham, 2009, p.236). These two covenants are concerned with fulfilling promises, and as the Abrahamic promises were fulfilled, so new promises relating to the eternal reign of David's descendants were made. The Old Testament sets out the history of the Israelites in terms of whether or not the people lived by the varying covenants. Expressions of these covenants, and of the host-guest relationship can be seen in some of the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (for example, see Psalm 2 and 110). Navone (2004, p.331) states that the climax of Old Testament references to God as host is contained in Psalm 23. Navone argues that the Psalmist compares God's provision to that of a shepherd for His sheep, but then moves on to refer to preparing a table more specifically, providing an overflowing cup and a home for the guest. Analogy and metaphor are used elsewhere in the Old Testament to interpret this host-guest relationship, as well as the covenant. For example, the Song of Solomon uses the metaphor of courtship and marriage. Key phrases and words (Fensham, 2009, p.234) used in association with the covenant relationship are *ahab* (to love), *hesed* (covenant love), *toba* (goodness or friendship), *shalom* (covenantal peace) and *yada* (to serve faithfully in accordance with the covenant). The entwining of love and faithfulness or obedience is strong throughout the Old Testament. This again indicates there is a tension between the conditional and unconditional nature of covenant, and therefore in terms of understanding the hospitable

relationship. The covenant relationship, whether conditional or unconditional, between God as 'host' and the Israelites as 'guests' therefore underpins the Old Testament narrative.

#### **4.3.4 Examples of hospitality in the Old Testament**

An understanding of this covenant relationship provides a lens through which specific passages about hospitality can be viewed. One of the first hospitality episodes in the bible is where Abraham hosts three guests (Genesis 18:1-15). Abraham is at the entrance to his tent, he is not inside. This suggests that he is both looking out for others and at the same time protecting his family within. As indicated earlier, providing hospitality was one way of showing obedience to God and living out the covenant relationship. This passage suggests that Abraham provided the best for his guests, treating them like royalty (Kidner, 1967); giving them water to wash their feet, as well as meat, cheese and milk. The passage indicates that the Lord speaks to Abraham through the guests, as one of them prophesies that Sarah will give birth to a son in her old age (Genesis 18:10). I would therefore agree with Pohl (1999) who highlights the fact that this passage connects hospitality with the presence of God, with promise and blessing. This was also the view of the New Testament writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who refers back specifically to this passage in Genesis and suggests that Abraham entertained angels without realising it (Hebrews 13:2). The writer of the epistle suggests in this verse that providing hospitality may bring unexpected blessing, as it did for Abraham.

In the covenant relationship, providing hospitality is given as a command. The command is to provide for those in need. In Leviticus 19:10, God instructs the Israelites to leave the edges of the fields unharvested, thus providing food for travellers and the poor. The practice of collecting the left-over harvest was known as gleaning. Hospitality was therefore about generosity and openness to others particularly those on the fringes of society. An example of this can be seen in the narrative account of Ruth (Ruth 2:1-3,18). According to this narrative, Ruth was a poor widow and a Moabite. She was a 'stranger' (or foreigner as she calls herself in 2:10) in every sense of the word. Boaz, named as a wealthy and influential man (Ruth 2:1), is sensitive to the needs of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. He goes beyond the gleaners' law, and out of his own abundance shows



kindness for the needy. He allows Ruth to glean, but also tells his workers to deliberately leave grain for her to collect and invites Ruth to eat with the workers (Ruth 2: 8-16). The text makes clear that he does more than the minimum. The word *hesed* (covenant love) is used three times in the book of Ruth. Wolfe (2011) indicates that the acts of *hesed* shown by Boaz through hospitality are an example of God's *hesed*. So Boaz in this sense is an archetype of God's covenant love. The hospitality described here is rooted in love and faithfulness. There is also a sense of responsibility tied to hospitality. Since Boaz was related to Naomi's late husband, he had responsibilities towards the family; there were expectations laid upon him. However, in this account he goes beyond these duties and expresses unconditional love. This is a helpful example of conditional and unconditional hospitality worked out in practice. It shows that both forms of hospitality can be positioned alongside each other without there necessarily being a tension between them.

Through the accounts of the Judges (Judges 4 - 9) hospitality becomes increasingly associated with personal sacrifice and keeping strangers safe. This is highlighted by the story of Rahab who puts her own life on the line by providing hospitality to a group of Israelite spies (Joshua 2:1-16). The concepts of safety and sacrifice are developed through the accounts of David. David shows kindness to Saul's relative Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:7-13). He offers him hospitality and the land that had belonged to Saul's family. Most kings at the time would have tried to wipe out any remaining members of a previous dynasty in order to prevent any descendants seeking to take the throne, but David did the opposite and showed compassion. There is a renewed sense of unconditional love expressed through hospitality. This is further illustrated by the account of the widow in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:10-24). This widow contrasts with David in terms of her social position, showing that hospitality is not tied to wealth. Widows were often poor and overlooked by others (Douglas and Tasker, 2009 p. 1239), whereas David was a king. In this account, even though the widow has hardly any flour or oil left, she provides for the prophet Elijah's physical needs. The account then suggests that God honours her obedience and sacrificial hospitality, by providing for her through a miracle. In the account, Elijah brings the widow's son back to life again and the supply of flour and oil continues for as long as Elijah is with her. Pohl (1999) emphasises the

fact that here the widow is the host to Elijah, yet through Elijah God becomes the host by providing for their needs. This is echoed again when Elisha visits the woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8), who provides hospitality expecting nothing in return, and later her son too is raised from the dead, this time by Elisha. Both these accounts demonstrate the close relationship between hospitality and serving God wholeheartedly through daily worship or service. There is also a sense of unexpected reward for providing hospitality. Both women benefit from offering hospitality even though they were not seeking any reward. In both cases hospitality brings blessing. The guests, Elijah and Elisha, offer a new encounter with God for each woman through a miracle because of the obedience they show (Pohl, 1999).

In the books of the prophets (e.g. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah) the theme of hospitality as worship is continued. True worship in these narratives is concerned with justice, sharing bread with the hungry and providing homes for the poor (Isaiah 58:7). As Webb (1996, p.226) maintains the prophets were concerned that worship was false because it was characterised by self-indulgence. The Israelites were celebrating festivals and making burnt offerings to God but not following it through in their daily lives or having sincerity of heart (e.g. Amos 5:21-27). For the prophets, true worship is regarded as living out daily a relationship with God (Webb, 1996, p.226). Faith is about showing kindness, generosity and bringing justice. In Isaiah, Israel are condemned because they are fasting, but at the same time oppressing people who work for them (Isaiah 58:1-6). Motyer (1999, p.361) says that true fasting is characterised by relationship and meeting the needs of others. The Israelites are being inhospitable, and not reflecting the loving nature of the true host, God. Hospitality is about providing for the poor and bringing justice. It is not just about providing a meal for someone, it is about providing an environment where all can flourish, where the needs of all are met.

In the book of Proverbs Wisdom is compared to true hospitality, or personified as a true host (Proverbs 9:1-10). Like all Hebraic virtues Wisdom is practical, not theoretical (Hubbard, 2009, p.1244). Wisdom is primarily understood as seeking correct moral and intellectual decision-making. Vande Kappelle (2014) shows that Wisdom is focused on practical success in everyday life, which he maintains is at the heart of the book of Proverbs (Vande Kappelle, 2014, p. 26). Wisdom is about living with

discernment (ibid., p. 17) and with paradox (ibid., p.20).

In this particular passage, Wisdom, as a personification of the agent of God, prepares a feast and invites everyone to it. Wisdom in this particular form is relational (ibid., p.38). The banquet laid out by Wisdom is fully inclusive of all and there are similarities with future eucharistic language. According to Harrington (2006) and Feldmeier (2012), early Christians often identified Jesus as the Wisdom of God. Harrington makes connections between Jesus' declaration as the bread of life, with the notion of Wisdom's banquet. Feldmeier suggests that Jesus is announcing to his followers that he is Wisdom's true divine feast. There is a sense of communion with Wisdom. In the passage, Wisdom provides satisfaction, knowledge of God and insight into life (Hubbard, 2009, p.1244). Wisdom's food is contrasted with that of Folly, who provides stolen food that does not sustain (Proverbs 9:13-17). In this example Wisdom appeals to the mind, whereas Folly appeals to the senses. The hospitality offered by Wisdom is therefore genuine, inclusive, providing knowledge and understanding.

Lastly, when considering the Old Testament view of hospitality, it is worth noting the role of Cities of Refuge (Deuteronomy 4:43 and Joshua 20:1- 9). These were cities where people could find safety if they had accidentally killed someone and had no previous record of hostility towards others. The aim was to protect the killer from possible revenge attack until a fair trial could be arranged. The Levites were in charge of these cities, thus indicating a priestly function in terms of mediation. The Cities of Refuge epitomise Old Testament hospitality in terms of offering an inclusive welcome and justice; they particularly welcomed the vulnerable and fearful.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusions and emerging themes based on the Old Testament narrative**

Taking Pohl's (1999) premise that the meta-narrative of the Old Testament is rooted in and shaped by the hospitality tradition, I have developed a more detailed analysis of Old Testament biblical texts to support this theory. I agree with Pohl's (1999) analysis which states that hospitality lies at the heart of the Israelite story and provides meaning and gives significance to it. This is dependent on an understanding of the covenant relationship between God (the host) and the Israelite people (the guests). The covenant relationship set the Israelites apart as strangers in their own

land (Pohl, 1999, p.27). God was the host, the land belonged to him, so the Israelites were regarded as strangers or guests in this land (Leviticus 25:23). The covenant also established them as a chosen people with responsibilities. God provided for the Israelites as strangers or guests in their own land, for example by providing manna and quail. In return the Israelites were to show love in practical ways to strangers in their midst. They were to live out the hospitality they were shown by God. I would argue that this is best evidenced through the life of Boaz because he best expressed the notion of *hesed* (covenant love), and illustrates how the tensions between conditional and unconditional hospitality can be worked out in practice.

Like Pohl (1999), therefore, I am arguing that the covenant relationship lies at the heart of hospitality as portrayed in the Old Testament. However, although I am using Pohl's theory of hospitality as the foundation for my understanding of the Old Testament narrative, I also diverge from her conclusions in relation to the legacy of the Old Testament in terms of the nature of hospitality in practice. This is because I have looked at some biblical accounts which Pohl has not focused on in her own writing. I have taken a broader view of hospitality and use a wider range of examples, because of my particular purpose in writing. Pohl's purpose was to recover the lost tradition of hospitality in Christian settings, whereas mine was to use a theology of hospitality to create a pedagogical framework. Some of the biblical texts we have chosen are therefore different, or I have placed more emphasis on some than others because of my purpose. Therefore, our conclusions although similar have distinct differences. In particular I have given more weight to the covenant relationship as underpinning hospitality and analysed passages relating to this in more depth. In light of this the following themes emerge as important when considering both the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools, and related pedagogical principles.

- Hospitality in the Old Testament is sacrificial and generous.

This is rooted in the covenant relationship. It is about giving up everything as identified in the accounts of Boaz, David and Rahab. In this sense hospitality is unconditional. God provides his presence unconditionally, and therefore the Israelites are expected to express this hospitality to their

fellow human beings in the same way. This theme underpins the meta-narrative of the Old Testament as suggested by Pohl (1999).

- Hospitality in the Old Testament is about service and daily worship or obedience to God.

This again is rooted in the covenant relationship and reflects the Israelites' response to God. It is about loving God and loving one's neighbour, and this is particularly illustrated through the prophets. Hospitality is a response to God in terms of wanting to bring about justice, or show welcome to others. In this sense, one may say that hospitality is conditional, by this I mean it is an act of obedience or loyalty to God. This is close to Pohl's notion of community provision and collective responsibility for the stranger (Pohl, 1999).

- Hospitality in the Old Testament is about an encounter with God.

This encounter either occurs directly with God himself (through a theophany) or through *hesed* (covenant love) expressed by the people of God. For example, the accounts of Abraham, Moses, Elijah and Elisha illustrate the way in which hosting leads to new encounters with God. It is also illustrated through the notion of Wisdom in the book of Proverbs. This is close to Pohl's (1999) idea of the household of welcome which suggests warmth and openness and a sense of family. Pohl maintains this is a key theme arising from the Old Testament narratives. However, unlike Pohl I want to emphasise the change that can take place through encounters. When hospitable encounters take place, change occurs. This is a theme through many of the Old Testament narratives. People or situations are transformed because people offer hospitality to others.

#### **4.4 Hospitality in the Four Gospels**

According to Bartchy (cited in Green and McKnight, 1992 p.796) it is difficult to underestimate the importance of hospitality in the New Testament, in particular meeting around a table. Bartchy, a New Testament scholar and social scientist, maintains that mealtimes in the first century were symbolic of friendship, intimacy and unity. Betrayal or unfaithfulness towards someone else at the table would have been unforgivable; on the other hand, a meal invitation was also a way to open up reconciliation.

Bartchy (1992) emphasises the importance of mealtimes in terms of determining social boundaries and hierarchy. This view is supported from an anthropological perspective by the work of Douglas (1972). She shows that in all cultures meals represent boundaries of identity. She states that if food is to be treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed (Douglas, 1972, p.61). She asserts that the message is related to hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion. In relation to New Testament Judaism, she argues that Jewish food laws not only symbolised cultural boundaries, but also created them. By analysing the Mosaic code on which New Testament Judaism was based, she maintains, through animal classification according to holiness, that any anomalous creature was not fit to be eaten at the table or offered on the altar. This, she says, is peculiar to the Mosaic code. She then takes this a step further by showing that the Israelites, bound by the covenant of Abraham, are distinguished from other people, and so therefore are their animals (Douglas, 1972, p.75). The laws surrounding the eating of certain animals and the treatment of them, not only defined the Jewish identity, but enabled it to be maintained and strengthened particularly in a time of occupation in the first century AD. This analysis by Douglas explains why the Pharisees regarded their tables at home as symbols for the Lord's altar in the temple and therefore why they tried to maintain ritual purity at all meal times (Bartchy, cited in Reid, 2004, p.1065). Marshall (cited in Reid 2004, p.739) maintains that for Jews every meal had religious overtones, as they provided an opportunity to give thanks to God. This context is crucial, as it is into this society that Jesus welcomes tax collectors and sinners to the table (Luke 5:29-30). Therefore, his actions may be interpreted as radical and attempting to subvert the Pharisaical norms of the time (Walters, 2014, p.186).

The theme of hospitality is woven throughout the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. This is largely because of the nature of Jesus' ministry as an itinerant preacher. He was reliant on the hospitality of others. Pohl (1999) argues that he is a gracious host, welcoming all manner of sinners and outcasts in society, yet in many of his encounters with others he becomes the host, when he is meant to be the guest (e.g. John 1:11). I analyse hospitality episodes in all four gospels, but pay particular attention to the Gospel of Luke.

#### **4.4.1 Examples in the Gospel of Mark**

Bartchy (cited in Reid, 2004, p.1065) maintains that hospitality is central to the entire theology of Mark's Gospel. He argues that table fellowship is a metaphor for Christian discipleship in this gospel. For Bartchy, the gospel's theology is primarily about the Kingdom of God as a new inclusive community not bound by status or hierarchy. He stresses the important place of key table fellowship events in the gospel narrative, and maintains that the climax of the gospel is the presentation of the Last Supper. For Bartchy (ibid., 2004, p.1066), Mark's gospel is about faithful discipleship based on what Jesus said and did when he shared bread with others, and then living out this servanthood. For example, Mark's version of the calling of Levi (Mark 2:15-17) places an emphasis on discipleship crossing social boundaries. Thus, Mark's Gospel presents a 'big picture' view of hospitality as conceived throughout the New Testament.

#### **4.4.2 Examples in the Gospel of Luke**

However, it is the Gospel of Luke which places Jesus' teaching at the heart of the shared meal. Luke provides the detail which is less evident in Mark's Gospel. Luke's Gospel is based around a travel narrative which begins and ends with the theme of hospitality (Hearon, 2004, p.393). Karris (2006, p.14) states that in Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal. Bartchy (cited in Reid, 2004, p.1066) argues that this is because Luke most likely experienced the symposium tradition of the day. A symposium was the drinking and talking party that followed a formal banquet in the Greco-Roman tradition. However, Chester (2011) argues that the meals in Luke are theological and the key to understanding the Kingdom of God. This is supported by Leithart (2000, p.115) who claims that Jesus not only uses the 'feast' as a metaphor for the kingdom, but brings it into reality through feasting. Chester (2011) takes a number of meal narratives in Luke and shows how they enact grace, community, hope, mission, salvation and promise. His purpose is similar to that of Pohl (2009) in that he aims to renew the idea of table fellowship and hospitality amongst Christian communities today. A study of the Gospel of Luke shows that hospitality is understood on multiple levels, particularly sociologically and theologically.

Since Luke's gospel places more emphasis on shared meals and

hospitality, I now take some specific examples of the table fellowship and reflect on their significance in terms of my research questions. I draw on the work of Bartchy (cited in Reid, 2004) and Chester (2011) who have made a particular study of these accounts. I also undertake three active contemplations bringing my own insights and interpretations which relate to my purpose in terms of creating pedagogical principles.

According to Bartchy (cited in Reid, 2004), an example of a symposium is evident when Jesus teaches at the table of a Pharisee. In this formal banquet setting (Luke 14:12-14), Jesus tells his followers to invite the lame, crippled and oppressed rather than their friends and rich neighbours to share in their feast. He says that friends and rich neighbours are likely to invite you back, so there is a reciprocal nature to the hospitality. However, Jesus wants the disciples to invite the poor, lame and crippled as there is no sense of reciprocity, so the hospitality is unconditional and without expectation of something in return. Jesus illustrates this with a parable (Luke 14:15-24). He emphasises that God's kingdom is for all people, but particularly for those who cannot reciprocate hospitality or those who are vulnerable and on the margins. It is about showing humility and being inclusive, thus challenging the norms of the day by inviting people to sit at the table who are not necessarily friends. My own reading of this indicates that priority is given to those who cannot reciprocate hospitality, thus indicating that it is unconditional in its nature and against the cultural and religious norms of the time (Douglas, 1972).

The interrelationship between host and guest is a recurring theme in the biblical narrative and arises in Luke 7:36-39. In this account, a Pharisee hosts a meal to which Jesus is an invited guest. As they are reclining at the table a woman enters and wipes Jesus' feet with her hair and anoints them. To Chester (2011) the account suggests that hospitality is uncomfortable and embarrassing. It is radical and disrupts social situations. He maintains that this type of hospitality will lead to collateral damage (Chester, 2011, p.52). By this he means that food will be spilled on the carpet, that there will be things that need to be cleaned up. It is messy. In this sense, I would argue that it is risky because people will question what one is doing if it does not fit the Pharisaical norms of the day. Chester (2011, p.53) makes a theological claim declaring that this is an example of grace; a pointer to God's kingdom. In addition, my reading of this indicates that the woman



becomes the host. The Pharisee had not offered water to wash the feet or greeted Jesus with a kiss, but the woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, she kissed his feet and anointed him. She expressed the cultural norms of the time in terms of hospitality, and therefore was the host who welcomed Jesus. The Pharisee is the theoretical host, who is not the host in reality. His view of hospitality was controlled by his sense of legalism, rather than inclusion. He reflects the Pharisaical social norms of the day as set out through their interpretation of the Mosaic code. Jesus challenges the central role of table fellowship at the time, which in the Pharisee's case was to reinforce boundaries and cultural identity. As Bartchy (cited in Reid, 2004, p.1065) states, Jesus uses meals to subvert these boundaries in both sociological and theological ways.

Although not expounded by Bartchy or Chester, the account of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) also demonstrates the interplay of Jesus as host and guest. In this account, Martha is busy entertaining and Mary is sitting in the presence of Jesus. Hearon (2004) emphasises the importance of Mary listening to the words of Jesus, and suggests this focus on listening lies at the heart of the narrative. In terms of hospitality, Mary truly serves Jesus as a guest because she spends time with him and listens. She puts him first, rather than being busy and trying to 'entertain'. Mary embodies the nature of a true host, which contrasts with the Pharisee in Luke 7. Yet at the same time, in this Luke 10 account, Jesus in his welcoming of Mary also becomes the host. Within the culture of the day, Jesus demonstrates radical hospitality by even talking to a woman; by accepting her hospitality he becomes the host in the sense that he is inviting her to join him as a disciple. This passage exemplifies Luke's theology based on hospitality and Jesus' invitation into the Kingdom of God (Good, 2010).

This interchange of host and guest is evident in the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and suggests that hospitality is about transformation. This narrative is unique to Luke's gospel, and Bartchy (2004) states that it is an example of the gospel writer's emphasis on the link between shared meals and the message of the Kingdom of God. Jesus invites himself to the home of Zacchaeus and crosses accepted social boundaries of the time. Although Zacchaeus hosts Jesus, Jesus in fact hosts Zacchaeus by offering him hope and salvation. So once again, meal imagery is used to convey key theological ideas and in particular here the

message of good news of reconciliation (Bartchy, 2004 p.1067) which leads to transformation in the life of Zacchaeus.

This transforming nature of hospitality is evident in the account of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34). In this passage, Jesus comes alongside two people; he does not interrupt them, but joins their conversation and explains the scriptures to them. He is like a guest in their conversations. Good (2010) suggests that it is on the road that Cleopas and the other disciple demonstrate hospitality by listening to Jesus and learning from him, whilst not recognising him. Chester (2011) and Pohl (2009) highlight the promise of Jesus' presence in this narrative. When Jesus is invited into the home of the disciples as a guest, he becomes the host. Jesus breaks the bread, usually done by the host, and it is in this moment that the account says, 'their eyes were opened' (Luke 24:31). It is at the point when Jesus changes from guest to host, that transformation takes place. In this moment, the account suggests that the two disciples experience the presence of the risen Christ. Pohl (2009, p.31) argues from a theological perspective that it is in the breaking of bread that the disciples see a foretaste of the final Kingdom banquet and also an anticipation of the Eucharist. Good (2010) maintains that the interplay between being guest and host is a mark of genuine and true hospitality. She takes this idea a step further by suggesting that hospitality is not to be located in a place, but in the actual act of welcoming the other. It is about being a host in an ontological sense.

Chester (2011) refers in his writings to two artistic representations of the Emmaus meal. The first is entitled, *Kitchen Maid with the Supper of Emmaus* (1618), and is by the Spanish artist Diego Velazquez. His own interpretation of this painting inspired me to undertake my own active contemplation (Figure 4) of this image in order to deepen my understanding of this narrative, particularly in relation to the idea of hospitality as being an ongoing act of love towards others. The contemplation here, and the others recorded in this thesis are a direct transcription of my personal notes as part of the hermeneutic process.

**An Active Contemplation: Diego Velazquez, Kitchen Maid with the Supper of Emmaus (1618)**

*Jesus and the disciples are depicted in the top left corner of the painting. However, the picture focuses on the servant girl and the ordinary kitchen objects surrounding her. She appears to be listening intently to what is going on in the room behind her. Her ear is turned to what is taking place. It almost seems that the artist is focusing on her as the true host. She is central to the picture. The artist suggests that this woman, who would have been on the margins of society in the first century, is welcome in God's kingdom. This servant is more than an observer, she is fully part of what is taking place around the table even though she is not sitting at it. Yet the image also conveys a sense of the ordinariness of life. The fact that hospitality is not about entertaining, but about love and relationship. This is shown through the simplicity of the objects. The simple bowl, jugs and dirty rag. Hospitality here is about daily living, about opening one's home. It is about being a servant to others, and having a servant heart.*

The image can be viewed at:

[http://www.nationalgallery.ie/en/Collection/Irelands\\_Favourite\\_Painting/Velazquez\\_Final/Final\\_Velazquez.aspx](http://www.nationalgallery.ie/en/Collection/Irelands_Favourite_Painting/Velazquez_Final/Final_Velazquez.aspx)

Figure 4: Active Contemplation (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

The second painting Chester (2011, p.148) refers to is by the Italian artist Caravaggio. He was painting at a similar time as Velazquez, and according to Chester (2011, p.148) the portrayal of Jesus is unusual for its time as he is beardless. He suggests this may represent the disciple's failure to recognise him. My active contemplation on this painting suggests that hospitality is about journey and spiritual transformation.

**An active contemplation: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,  
Supper at Emmaus (1601)**

*Jesus appears in the centre of the painting with three other characters. According to the gospel narrative there were only two on the road to Emmaus, so perhaps the character standing is a servant. This is also suggested by his different attire. The moment of revelation is expressed through the expressions of each of the figures. The figure who is standing appears to be trying to 'read' the actions of Jesus, he seems to be thinking. It is difficult to tell where his eyes are focused, they seem to be fixed more on the man with his arms outstretched, rather than on Jesus. The figure with his back to me is trying to push away his chair, as if in astonishment or surprise. His clothes are torn indicating perhaps his poverty. The man on the right-hand side has his arms open and outstretched. He wears a scallop-shell which was a symbol for pilgrims at the time the painting was created. Through this symbol there is conveyed a sense of journey, both physical and spiritual. There is a gap at the table in the foreground, where a basket of fruit is about to fall off the table. It is almost as if the painting invites the viewer into the scene. Jesus' hand is raised in a welcoming, beckoning motion, and there is a sense of wanting to stop the fruit from falling on the floor. There is a sense of movement and transformation in the picture, it is not static. It invites me to enter into this simple scene. It is ordinary, yet extraordinary. The food, clothes and objects like the previous image are from the everyday, yet the moment is clearly out of the ordinary. The encounter with Jesus in this moment leads to change. Hospitality in this image is about welcome and invitation, about the extraordinary happening within the ordinary. It is about transformation and hope for the future.*

The image can be viewed at:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio-the-supper-at-emmaus>

Figure 5: Active Contemplation (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

Chester (2011) maintains that this sense of revelation of the person of Jesus, in terms of offering hope, is demonstrated most clearly in the account of The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Luke 9:10-17) In this narrative, Jesus is shown to be the host who welcomes and demonstrates

the abundance of God's provision. It is the only miracle narrative to occur in all four gospels, which may indicate the importance of sharing food, welcome and hospitality to the early church (Bartchy, 2004, p.1065). In his commentary on Luke, Morris (1986, p.166) indicates that Jesus welcomes the people and understands their needs, even though the account suggests that he wanted to slip away and be alone. The people interrupt his schedule, but he shows compassion to them. Jesus could have sent them away to find food, but he knows they need nourishment; both physically and spiritually. This demonstrates the Christian idea that God provides the resources people need for complete wholeness. This suggests that hospitality is about providing for deepest need; it is not superficial. It is more than providing a meal, it is about deep connection with people. It is about relationship.

The Last Supper account also illustrates Jesus acting as host (e.g. Luke 22). There is debate about whether this was a Passover meal or not (Stein, 2004, pp.668-669) however there is general agreement that it took place at the time of the Passover festival. The Passover commemorates the escape from Egypt of the Israelites and through this celebration Jewish children grow up to understand their identity as the nation of Israel (Chester, 2011, p.113). Pohl (2009, p.30) shows how Jesus uses the meal as a way of expressing reconciliation with God through a new covenant. The Last Supper looks back, but also looks forward to the future. Walters (2014), drawing on the work of Pohl (2009), suggests that the Last Supper brings together the different elements of hospitality as exemplified throughout the ministry of Jesus and the entire biblical narrative. She summarises this by saying that the hospitality of God is demonstrated through the giving of himself through his Son, Jesus. Through this act of sacrifice, God the host becomes a guest in the world through Jesus (Walters, 2014). At the Last Supper, Jesus brings new symbolic meaning to a Jewish ritual meal of bread and wine (Pohl, 2009, p.30). The word covenant is used in Luke 22:20 reflecting the Old Testament theology linked to promise, contract and responsibility. In this episode a new covenant is created indicating a new relationship and form of hospitality. Walters (2014) sums this up by saying that in the Last Supper Jesus becomes the ultimate host by 'not only breaking bread with sinners, but becoming the bread for sinners' (Walters, 2014, p.186).

The importance of the Last Supper and the breaking of bread is developed in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42, 20:7,11). The importance of *koinonia* (fellowship) is stressed in these accounts and Marshall (1992), in his commentary on this passage, suggests this reflects an emphasis on Jesus being personally present, though unseen. This would indicate a continuation of the Old Testament understanding of hospitality being connected to the presence of God, but here it is through the person of Jesus, rather than through the Tabernacle. Many scholars (Pohl, 1999, p.30) suggest that the Last Supper is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to come, and thus that the Eucharist today is an expression of God's hospitality. As a consequence, Chester (2011) and Pohl (2009) argue that the Christian community today needs to recover the lost tradition of hospitality. The fact that passages such as Acts 20:7 indicate a weekly 'breaking of bread' show its importance in the early church. Hospitality through meals was not an 'add on', it was regarded as fundamental to the Christian life. In addition, as Walters (2014, p.187) intimates, the breaking of bread was part of a meal where conversation and discourse took place and the table was open to all. The breaking of bread was therefore not just about the Eucharistic meal, but a broader expression of hospitality around a meal.

There are many visual representations of the Last Supper, but the following was chosen as a piece for active contemplation for two reasons. Firstly, it is an image that I have seen used regularly in schools and so was already familiar to me. Secondly, it was commissioned as response to traditional images of the Last Supper only depicting men at the meal with Jesus and I felt it would offer an alternative interpretation. Fisher and Wood (1993), writing from a feminist theological perspective, invited artists to create a more inclusive, truer image of the Last Supper. The image which emerged was a work by Margaret Ackland which includes women and children (including a breastfeeding mother). This active contemplation draws out the inclusive nature of hospitality.

**An active contemplation: Margaret Ackland, The Last Supper (1993)**

*There is a sense of intimacy and engagement, a sense of questioning and listening, the angle of the light highlights the importance of the bread and wine not the table, and the covenant relationship represented through the Jewish menorah candles. The unusual perspective from behind Jesus enables the viewer to become part of the picture, yet also be an observer of the scene. It is almost like the viewer is approaching the table to serve - it invites hospitality. The scene shows the inclusiveness of the hospitality that Jesus demonstrated. All are seated, none is higher than the other. Men and women sit next to each other, the room appears crowded as if it is a gathering of more than just the twelve. This suggests that the Last Supper is open to all, there is no 'closed door'. Whilst it may or may not be an accurate historical representation, as most likely it would have only been men at the table, it is a more accurate interpretation of the theology of hospitality as expounded through the scriptures. My understanding of this image suggests a vision of the feast of the Kingdom of God as expounded by Jesus, and lived out by him in his table fellowship with people from all social classes and cultures.*

The image can be viewed at:

<http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=775&lang=en&action=show>

Figure 6: Active Contemplation (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

#### **4.4.3 Examples in the Gospel of John**

The Gospel of John includes an account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13:1-17) as part of the Last Supper account. Here Jesus takes on the form of a lowly servant to demonstrate true service and hospitality as an example to the disciples. Brueggeman (1976), a biblical scholar, writes about the towel and basin Jesus uses in this episode:

A towel is not firm and manageable. It is flexible to the point of being shapeless. It receives its shape not really from my hands, but from the feet around which it is wrapped for drying purposes. He gave us tools that are shaped not in the heat of conviction, but in the gentle touch of those whom we would include in the beloved community.

(Brueggeman, 1976, p.143)

Brueggeman (1976) indicates it is in service and through relationship that Christians demonstrate the love of God. It is in focusing on the guest, and in this instance the disciples' feet, that a servant heart and attitude is shown. It is in this attitude and action that true hospitality is manifested. The only other occasion when Jesus hosts a meal is after his resurrection in John 21:12-13. Here Jesus cooks and serves a meal for his disciples. The timing of this meal suggests that the emphasis is on Peter being restored, thus removing the cloud of his denial (John 21:15-19). In this account, too, Jesus as host acts as both servant **and** master, as he does in the Last Supper account. He also offers hope and a new vision mirroring the Emmaus Road episode.

Earlier in John's gospel, in the narrative of the Wedding of Cana (John 2 :1-11), Jesus is a guest but becomes the host. Within society at the time, running out of wine broke the unwritten laws of hospitality and would have been an embarrassment to the host. Jesus, as guest, becomes the host by providing the wine. This is another example of Jesus meeting needs, and not only physical need but also emotional and cultural needs. Pohl (2009, p.30) argues that this notion of providing for all needs is emphasised by Jesus when he refers to himself as the 'bread of life' (John 6:35) and 'living water' (John 4:14). Jesus states that he is the ultimate host, the one who provides everything. In John's Gospel this teaching is set within the context of the feeding of the five thousand, so it reinforces the argument put forward earlier, in relation to Luke's gospel, that God provides for the deepest needs; the physical, but also the spiritual.

#### **4.4.4 An example in the Gospel of Matthew**

One parable worth mentioning in the Gospel of Matthew which does not appear in the other gospel accounts is the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:34-46). According to Pilch (1995, pp.166-167), sheep symbolised



honour and strength, whereas goats were considered a symbol of shame. The separating of the sheep and the goats was a symbolic way of drawing a distinction between two groups which would have been well understood at the time of writing. In this passage, hospitality is mentioned as a sign of a true believer (the sheep). This is reflected elsewhere in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 10:40-42), when Jesus says that welcoming others means welcoming Christ. As Pilch suggests, true hospitality is seen in this instance as treating Jesus hospitably and is a mark of the Kingdom of God (Pilch, 1995, p.168)

#### **4.4.5 Conclusions and emerging themes based on the gospel narratives**

The Gospel accounts build on and reflect Old Testament teachings, but they also transform them. The following themes emerge from my analysis of the gospel accounts:

- Hospitality is closely related to the Kingdom of God and a new understanding of the covenant relationship with God.

Pohl (1999, p.29) states that Jesus gave everything as host to welcome all into the Kingdom of God. Bartchy (2004, p.1067) suggests that the hospitality of Jesus, and in particular the table fellowship he had with people, was a living parable of the new covenant relationship with God. I have also argued that Jesus' followers were first invited to be guests, but then became hosts. God offered them reconciliation, forgiveness and unconditional love through the person of Jesus so that they might go and offer this to others. The tension between conditional and unconditional hospitality is almost resolved in the gospel accounts. This is most likely because the nature of the covenant has changed. There is now in place a new covenant as offered by Jesus in the Last Supper narrative. So unconditional hospitality is seen as a mark of discipleship, and a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

- Hospitality is subversive and sometimes risky, but can lead to transformation.

The accounts of Jesus eating with sinners, the oppressed and outcasts demonstrate that hospitality is to be radical and not to remain within the

norms of Pharisaical society. In this sense hospitality is also unconditional, as Jesus subverts the Pharisaical boundaries of the day and welcomes all to the table (Bartchy, 2004, p.1065). In addition, these dissenting forms of hospitality led to transformation, as illustrated for example in the account of Zacchaeus and the woman who washed Jesus' feet.

- Hospitality is about Jesus' presence.

This is best illustrated through the accounts of Mary and Martha, and also on the Road to Emmaus. In these accounts, it is Jesus' presence that **is** the hospitality. This means hospitality is not a place or something that people do, but rather being a presence to other people. It is ontological.

#### **4.5 Hospitality in the writings of St. Paul and the early church**

Pohl (2009) asserts that hospitality was central to Christian practice in the early church. She maintains this for three reasons. Firstly, that shared meals helped to promote a sense of equality and inclusion (Pohl, 2009, p.32) and secondly, that the gospel spread through engaging with and being dependent on the hospitality of others (ibid., p.32). Lastly, she argues that worship primarily took place in the homes of believers, so hospitality was a natural outworking of the Christian faith (ibid., p.32). It is for this reason that hospitality is reflected in some of the writings of St. Paul.

In his letter to Titus, Paul puts forward hospitality as an important characteristic of leadership (Titus 1:8). In this passage, Paul is describing the qualifications required to be an elder and inviting people into the home is regarded as an essential quality. Pohl (2009, p.32) stresses the role of Christian women in providing hospitality and that they are held up by Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:9-10). Paul also emphasises the Old Testament view of the sacrificial nature of hospitality, when he refers to meeting the needs of guests (Romans 12:13). as opposed to the focus on the host as 'entertainer'. This suggests that hospitality is about a place to stay, a place of nourishment, a place where you are listened to, and a place of acceptance. Hospitality can therefore happen anywhere, and at any time. Hospitality is not about wealth or status or social entertaining, it is about love. This confirms the notion of hospitality as '**being** a host' and not dependent on a place.

Paul's teachings on the Lord's Supper or Eucharist are put forward

comprehensively in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Paul refers back to the tradition he received from 'the Lord'. By this, one can assert that he means the Last Supper as he refers to a tradition he received through the church (1 Corinthians 11:23). As Marshall maintains (2009, p.738) the focus in Paul's writing is on the sense of unity and love that should characterise the meal. There is a sense of obligation and duty tied to the meal in Paul's writing, and this is most likely linked back to the command given by Jesus at the Last Supper to 'do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22 :19-20). Marshall (2009, pp.740-741) maintains that the Pauline teachings are a direct response to some tensions between rich and poor in the Corinthian church. The exact nature of the tensions is disputed (ibid., p.740), but the issue for Paul was the lack of inclusion and unity in the expression of hospitality. In Pauline teachings on hospitality there is a continued emphasis on love, unity and inclusion which is based on the tradition handed down to him.

#### **4.6 Conclusions and emerging themes from the biblical narratives on the nature of hospitality**

Drawing together the conclusions so far, the following themes emerge in relation to my two research questions.

##### **4.6.1 Emerging themes**

##### **Importance of the covenant relationship**

Hospitality is about a covenant relationship. The biblical view suggests that this is twofold. Hospitality is about serving God, an expression of love for God, and an act of daily worship. It is a response to God's love. It is contractual in this sense. It is a covenant. However, this outworking of the covenant relationship means that the response is seen not only through worship to God, but also through service to others. This means the covenant relationship is worked out through relationships with people; for example through love for the neighbour or acts of compassion and generosity. These two aspects are to be held in synthesis. This theme is evident in both the Old and New Testament accounts. I will use an analogy to explain this idea. Weaving the weft is the term for the thread which is drawn through the warp to create cloth. The warp is held in high tension during the weaving process, therefore the warp must be a strong yarn. The biblical view of hospitality may be seen in this way; the warp being the

expression of love for God or an act of worship, and the weft being the weaving of love for the neighbour through this. The two are united. When the love of God is strong, it provides a firm foundation for the acts of hospitality to be woven through, to create a beautiful expression of acceptance and inclusion of others. In the Old Testament this theme is seen in terms of service, in the New Testament this is seen through the expressions of the Kingdom of God. Above all, it is about relationships.

### **Encountering God's presence which leads to transformation**

There is a sense that hospitality is about God's presence. There is a strong indication throughout the biblical texts that an encounter with God takes place in and through hospitality. God's presence is felt and sensed, people are changed or transformed through the experience. Hospitality is therefore not something that occurs in a particular place or time, but is experienced through encounter. It is ontological in nature. Examples in both the Old and New Testament can be cited to show how hospitality leads to not only physical sustenance, but also emotional and spiritual change.

### **Meeting the needs of all**

The biblical sources suggest that hospitality is about the needs of the guests and providing a place where all are accepted and loved. Hospitality is to be fully inclusive. The host listens and serves, providing nourishment not only physically, but also for the soul. All the accounts, both in the Old and New Testament, suggest that hospitality is more than providing a meal. It is about knowledge, understanding, wisdom and spirituality. It is about meeting deep needs on multiple levels. In the Old Testament this is illustrated particularly through the notion of wisdom, and in the New Testament through Jesus' encounters with those on the margins. In the New Testament, biblical hospitality becomes more subversive. It pushes the boundaries and breaks them. It turns hierarchy on its head, it takes risks and puts the host in a position of vulnerability. Spaces are created for hospitality to take place, that are different and radical.

#### **4.6.2 A paradox?**

The following two emerging themes are paradoxes which have an important role to play in the developing hypothesis.

## **The paradox of the conditional and unconditional**

There is a sense that hospitality is both conditional and unconditional. There is a tension between reciprocal hospitality, and that provided without any conditions. The Old Testament passages in particular indicate a conditional nature to hospitality, based on *hesed* (covenant love). The New Testament, by contrast, tends towards a more unconditional love, as expressed through the new covenant ordained at the Last Supper. To some extent, the New Testament passages subjugate the Old Testament ones, but there is still a sense of responding to 'the other', even if it is through worship rather than a sense of duty or obedience.

## **Interplay of host and guest**

However, the interplay of host and guest can help us to understand this paradox. This interplay of host and guest means that the notion of hospitality is fluid. Terminology is not fixed and, if the host becomes guest and vice versa, then the issue of whether hospitality is conditional or not becomes less of an issue. This is because the boundaries between the two are not fixed and by the host becoming guest and vice versa questions of reciprocity do not arise. This also connects to the notion of hospitality not being about a place, but about **being** a host. Hospitality is ontological in nature, it is about a sense of being. If hospitality is 'embodied' then it is not tied to what a person does, but is instead about who they are.

The emerging themes identified through the analysis of biblical sources in this chapter have formed the first layer of hypothesis development. In the following chapter I undertake a conceptual literature review of literature relating to a Christian theology of hospitality in order to continuing the layering process, and begin to formulate answers to my two research questions.

## **Chapter 5. A Review of Conceptual Literature based on a theology of hospitality**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter Four I formulated emerging themes from the biblical narratives based on the nature of hospitality. This chapter builds on that understanding through a review of conceptual literature. This review adds layers of further interpretation to my understanding of a theology of hospitality and how it might relate to religious education in Church of England schools. Through the chapter the hermeneutical process is at work as I draw conclusions from my reading of the literature and consider the application of emerging themes to religious education. This chapter falls into three distinct sections:

- An explanation of the rationale behind my selection of conceptual literature to review (5.1)
- An analysis of conceptual literature which broadened and deepened my understanding of a Christian theology of hospitality (5.2)
- An analysis of conceptual literature which developed my understanding of the use of a Christian theology of hospitality by educationalists in fields beyond religious education (5.3)

### **5.1 An explanation of the rationale behind my selection of conceptual literature to review**

The literature available on hospitality was vast, therefore a clear rationale was required in order to determine which conceptual literature to review and which to leave aside. The initial selection of material was based on works referenced in the paper, *Doing God in Education* (Cooling, 2010). This led to other works by Cooling (2013) and Smith (2009, 2011) as they had referred to and used a theology of hospitality in an educational context. They referenced other literature which I then analysed and interpreted. As the research process developed it was evident that my inclusion of literature was not going to be systematic. However, it was governed by two specific criteria:

- Conceptual literature which broadened and deepened my understanding

of a Christian theology of hospitality

- Conceptual literature which developed my understanding of the use of a Christian theology of hospitality by educationalists in fields beyond religious education

These criteria were chosen in order to enable me to effectively build on my understanding of hospitality based on the biblical narratives, and to begin to make specific links with both the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools and with pedagogy.

This meant the selection of material was serendipitous, but within the context of the two criteria stated above. When a skier stands at the top of the piste they know where they want to go, and where they plan to end up at the end of the piste. However, as they ski down the piste they may decide to go 'off piste' at certain points to explore new avenues. However, at some point they will always need to come back on piste to reach the bottom. The literature chosen for this reviewing process had to be pieces which would help me to get to the bottom of the piste, i.e. they had to build on my developing understanding and be based on the emerging themes from Chapter Four. Each piece was also chosen because of its connections to my research questions and the two criteria stated above. However, along the way I sometimes went 'off piste' as I explored new lines of enquiry. For example, this occurred as a result of the empirical component. Sometimes going 'off piste' brought new insights and new ways of thinking about hospitality. However, it also meant that some pieces were rejected, because they either took me too far away from 'the piste' or because they led to dead ends.

One example of this was the different ways in which hospitality was understood in different contexts. Morrison (2002) explores some of the issues in relation to this in determining what an academic field of 'hospitality' would look like. She maintains there is no clear conceptual framework because of the diverse nature of the field, and puts forward a preliminary attempt at conceptualising hospitality research from a social science perspective (2002, p.166). Thus, some documents were found which had little to say on my particular research question because

hospitality was conceptualised in a sociological, rather than theological way. On the other hand, some documents which on the surface appeared to have little to say, for example, because they were not about education, provided insights and perspectives that broadened my understanding.

Undertaking the research over seven years meant that the volume of literature grew and I continually had to make choices. Nevertheless, the conceptual literature was selected specifically to allow a proposition to emerge that would be appropriate for Church of England schools and understandable by teachers. Therefore, I limited the conceptual literature to achieve these aims.

I now explain in more detail how I selected the literature based on my criteria.

#### **5.1.1 Selecting literature which broadened and deepened my understanding of a Christian theology of hospitality**

The aim in selecting these documents was to broaden and deepen my understanding of hospitality building on the emerging themes in Chapter Four. This enabled me to explore ways in which contemporary writers had interpreted biblical texts and how they had applied this to their own 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century settings. As Pohl (1999) referred back to the Rule of St. Benedict (c.480-550), I felt it important to begin with this historical perspective and used a translation of this text by Verheyen (1949). This then led me to the work of Homan and Pratt (2007) who have applied the principles of the Benedictine Rule to their own Christian community. This literature was not related to education per se, so it was approached with caution since it had different purposes to my own. However, I wanted to establish whether their interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict offered some insights into using hospitality within a different setting. I also aimed to broaden my theological understanding of hospitality by analysing texts from different Christian traditions. Thus, I analysed the work of Nouwen (1998), a Roman Catholic theologian, as well as Sutherland (2006), who provides a Jesuit perspective. As themes emerged, this led me to other sources which supported (Bretherton, 2006) or offered different perspectives (York, 2002;



Westfield, 2001) on my developing understanding of a Christian theology of hospitality. The aim was always to allow the emerging themes from the biblical narratives in Chapter Four to be developed further or challenged.

The selection was also informed by the second part of my literature review in Chapter Two. Here I raised the question of the purpose of RE and its relationship to the Christian ethos in Church schools. This was the reason for undertaking an analysis of the work of Ross (2008) since her work made connections between hospitality and the notion of mission. In many ways Bretherton (2006), Homan and Pratt (2007), Nouwen (1998) and York (2002) also provided perspectives on this. Lastly, as part of broadening my understanding I considered briefly the work of Derrida (2000). Although not writing from a Christian perspective, his work provided a challenge particularly in relation to the conditional or unconditional nature of hospitality which was a question raised through the biblical analysis.

### **5.1.2 Selecting literature which developed my understanding of the use of a Christian theology of hospitality by educationalists in fields beyond religious education**

The aim in selecting this literature was to consider how hospitality and education and more specifically pedagogy may or may not be connected. This section includes literature referred to specifically by Cooling in his paper, *Doing God in Education* (2010). This paper influenced the formation of my research questions. Therefore, to gain an understanding of what underpinned Cooling's assertions was particularly important. In this section, the work of Smith (2009) and Palmer (2007) are analysed in depth. Smith (2009) begins from a theological perspective and applies this to the educator, whereas Palmer (2007) begins with the notion of good teaching and applies the concept of hospitality to it. I am aware that both these educationalists work in an American/Canadian context, which is different to that of my own. For example, there is an emphasis on Christian faith formation in American/Canadian Christian education which is not the case in Church of England schools.

In light of the comments raised in my focus group (in Chapter Seven) about

the potential feminist or feminine nature of my principles, I also considered some of these perspectives in relation to hospitality and pedagogy. My research indicated that there were limited sources available, but nevertheless I have included two particular responses from McAvoy (1998) and Russell (1993). In addition, I felt it important to consider what had been written about the relationship between hospitality and education in other subject areas, in order to see if there was anything that RE might learn from them. Again, the literature in this field seemed light, although I have included two brief perspectives relating to the arts (Higgins, 2007) and literacy in higher education (Haswell, Haswell and Blalock, 2009).

It is important to note here the reasons why some writings about hospitality were not analysed in depth. For example, the work of Siddiqui (2015) is well known in relation to hospitality. However, although she writes about Christian almsgiving and charity in terms of hospitality these aspects are less well connected to my focus on education and pedagogy. In addition, her work is primarily rooted in Islamic theology which is not the focus of my research question. In addition, the work of Levinas (1969), writing from a Jewish perspective, was not explored for similar reasons. Lastly, many contemporary studies of hospitality, including journal articles, are often connected to the hospitality industry and this was not the focus of my research question. Thus, I included some in my wider reading but have not analysed them in depth for this piece of research.

## **5.2 Broadening and deepening my understanding of a Christian theology of hospitality**

In this section I broaden and deepen my understanding of hospitality building on the emerging themes in Chapter Four. After I have reviewed each piece of literature I summarise my developing understanding of hospitality based on what I have read and analysed. At the end of this section I draw conclusions and apply my developing understanding to the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools, and in relation to preliminary pedagogical principles.

### **An exploration of the Benedictine principles of hospitality and contemporary interpretations**

In this analysis, I draw on three particular sources. Firstly, the Holy Rule of

St. Benedict (as translated by Verheyen, 1949), the writings of Homan and Pratt (2007), and Pohl (1999). Homan and Pratt lead Benedictine monastic retreats and write from this perspective. Homan is a Benedictine monk, and he and Pratt outline a new radical hospitality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century based on Benedictine spirituality. Their reflections are not written for religious education teachers or academics but for the anyone who wants to live a life of compassion and generosity. I wanted to examine their work to see if they provided insights that could be useful in the world of education.

Benedict, writing in the 6th Century (c.480-550), instructed his monks to welcome the Divine in the stranger (Verheyen, 1949, p.60). He told them to look deeper into the eyes of the stranger and to learn with and from the stranger. For Homan and Pratt (2007), St. Benedict's Rule indicates that to become fully human is only possible through others; it is about relationship. Hospitality, in a Benedictine sense, means to treat all with respect because everyone is regarded as sacred. As St. Benedict says of the stranger, 'let Christ be adored in them as He is also received' (Verheyen, 1949, p.60). There is a sense that Christ is encountered through the other (Homan and Pratt, 2007, p.40), so putting into practice the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46). This parable suggests that if one tends the hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick and prisoners then one is also looking after Jesus. The welcomer is to ensure the guests feel at home because Christ himself is received in the poor and travellers (Verheyen, 1949, p.60).

There is a focus on the importance of listening in the Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule begins with an invitation to listen (Verheyen, 1949, p.2). The core of monastic life is to listen; listening with open ears, but also open eyes and an open heart. Homan and Pratt (2007) stress the importance of listening in terms of enabling people to feel real. For example, when someone is not heard, or when children are ignored, they are not allowed to be real, they are made into something they were never intended to be. When we listen we also get past ourselves, i.e. we focus on the other person. Listening to someone else's story means being willing to learn from them; this means being willing to develop a bond, a relationship with them.

Listening is at the heart of Benedictine spirituality because it is the only way to see through the eyes of another. When we listen to another, we catch a slight glimpse of their soul. We create an open

page where they are free to write their story. We help people remember who they are.

(Homan and Pratt, 2007, p.222)

Homan and Pratt show that monastic hospitality creates sacred space where the guest is free to be alone, to enter silence, to pray and rest. They say, 'it is more like a refuge centre for the traveler who needs shelter from the thieves along the way' (Homan and Pratt, 2007, p. xviii).

This reflects the Cities of Refuge (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:43) theology, cited in the biblical narratives. In addition, in ancient times it was often dangerous to travel alone; pilgrims would travel as groups together. Historically, at a monastery everyone is there because they are traveling on a journey, either physical or spiritual. Homan and Pratt (2007) provide a very inclusive approach where all are seen as journeyers, but on different stages of the journey. However, Pohl (1999) asserts that whilst St. Benedict placed hospitality centrally in monastic life, it was not to disturb other monastic disciplines. Hospitality therefore was ordered and managed (1999, p.47). One of the challenges for Benedictines was to preserve their monastic distinctiveness whilst also welcoming the stranger. This is demonstrated in the rule devoted to the reception of guests (Verheyen, 1949, p.60). In this rule, monks are encouraged to approach guests with honour and humility, yet also instructed not to speak to them unless they had been ordered to do so. As Pohl (1999) maintains, the guests were warmly welcomed into monastic communities, but into a structured setting. It was in this structured setting that the guest became known and understood. There was an emphasis on openness, but within distinct parameters or conditions.

It was whilst I was reading the work of Homan and Pratt (2007) that I first considered the notion of an embrace as a major theme for the developing thesis. It was in relation to explaining the idea of welcome within a distinctive setting, that the notion of embrace was used. I will explore this more extensively later, nevertheless Homan and Pratt (2007, p. xxvi) refer to the importance of accepting and receiving others, and use the term 'embracing'. By this they mean taking an open stance to the other person, yet remaining distinct. The challenge for Benedictines according to Homan and Pratt was to preserve monastic distinction, whilst welcoming the stranger (2007, p.13).

For Homan and Pratt (2007, p.35) there is also a moral dimension because hospitality seeks to put an end to injustice, as all are included and equality is promoted. This reflects the Old Testament prophets' understanding of hospitality. As well as a moral dimension, Homan and Pratt (2007) have a deep spiritual element in their interpretation. They emphasise the relational nature of spirituality and the notion that genuine spirituality unsettles and challenges, and brings about change in the person (2007, p.35). They argue that hospitality lies at the heart of this genuine spirituality because it encourages people to connect with one another (2007, p.36). We may think that St. Benedict was writing in a time very different from our own.

However, in many ways people now, and as they were in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, are searching for wisdom, but are often fearful of engagement with others and learning from them (Homan and Pratt, 2007, p.76). Homan and Pratt (2007) maintain that unless we interact and engage with others and open ourselves to others we will grow more isolated and insular, and put up more barriers or bricks around us (2007, p.xxii). They assert that instead we should be removing the bricks. Hospitality they argue is about entering into an adventure, where one welcomes one person at a time (2007, p.38).

Homan and Pratt (2007) also refer to the balance and interplay of cloister, community and hospitality. Cloister is the time for being alone, community is about close relationships, and hospitality is the interactions in all other relationships, especially those outside our comfort zones. For the monk, these three are to be woven together into a holistic balance (Homan and Pratt, 2007, pp.88-89). Homan and Pratt argue for a rebalancing of life as each aspect is dependent on the other. For them silence and solitude (the cloister) is both about place and a state of mind (2007, p.94). They place importance on companions (community) in the journey of life because they provide support as well as wisdom (2007, p.97). Lastly, they maintain that hospitality provides opportunities to welcome those on the edge and share ourselves with others (2007, p.104).

To summarise, this literature suggests that relationships and listening to others are fundamental aspects of hospitality. There is also a sense that hospitality is something one enters into, not something that is done to others. There is a strong indication that hospitality is about openness and welcome, yet is balanced by the maintaining of a distinctive tradition, in this case the Benedictine monastic tradition. Lastly, the notion of balancing

solitude with community and relationships is evident in the way the Rule of St. Benedict is put into practice.

### **The work of Catherine Ross (2008) - hospitality as a metaphor for mission**

Ross is a theologian with particular interests in hospitality, mission and feminism. I was drawn to the work of Ross because of the issues raised in the second half of my literature review in Chapter Two about the relationship between the Church of England mission and the purpose of RE. In analysing the work of Ross (2008) it is possible to determine if a theology of hospitality provides a way forward for understanding the complex relationship between mission and education in Church of England schools. In her paper, *Creating Space: Hospitality as a metaphor for mission* (2008), Ross advocates the metaphor of hospitality as a good one for expressing the different aspects of mission. She cites The Five Marks of Mission (1984) and shows how each aspect is exemplified through a biblical understanding of hospitality. The Five Marks of Mission were developed by the Anglican Consultative Council over 30 years and were adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996. The marks provide a way of understanding the nature of mission in the contemporary world. They are also endorsed by other Christian denominations, including The Methodist Church in Great Britain.

The Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
- To respond to human need by loving service.
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

(Anglican Consultative Council, 1984)

Ross draws direct parallels between her theological understanding of Christian hospitality and the Five Marks of Mission. Ross explains that the first mark of proclaiming the good news involves hospitality of invitation,

welcome and sometimes confrontation. The second and third marks are about discipleship and service. Ross maintains that this fits with the idea of hospitality as seeing the other through the eyes of Christ. The fourth mark of mission is about social transformation. Ross claims this fits with the idea of hospitality from the margins. The final mark of mission is about creation, but also the creator. Ross argues that this is about God the creator who creates space and room for all, bringing renewal and change.

Therefore, Ross (2008) articulates a notion of hospitality which is about welcome, seeing the other through the eyes of Christ, accepting those from the margins and about creating space. Whilst she writes with evangelism as her primary aim, there is much to learn from her paper in relation to my research question. Ross bases her arguments on the biblical narratives I have highlighted in the previous chapter, showing that through sharing stories and food people become more authentic with one another (2008, pp.168 -169). Listening forms a central part to this, for example listening to one another and honouring the story that someone else is telling you. Sharing food, she says, encourages a sense of family, and relationships are forged through this practice. Ross states that it is not a surprise, therefore, that the Eucharist combines story and food, and is at the heart of Christian worship. The Eucharistic prayers remind Christians they are sinners, or strangers, and are welcomed into God's household by grace. She argues that people also need strangers to show them new aspects and dimensions of God; she maintains that through encountering strangers people see their own lives in a new way (2008, p.170). For example, they think about themselves differently and gain a different perspective on their place in the world. This concurs with the understanding of Benedictine hospitality outlined by Homan and Pratt (2007). Listening, and listening to the stranger or those on the margins, is emerging as a central theme in this thesis.

Ross shows that the Greek term for hospitality, *philoxenia*, is about delighting in the guest-host relationship and in the surprises that may occur. Jesus is portrayed as host of tax collectors, children and sinners as well as a guest who is often rejected or not received. Ross highlights this idea of guest-host in the Emmaus Road story (Luke 24: 13-32), where Jesus is guest but also host at the table. Ross argues that Christians therefore need to offer themselves as hosts, but also be recipients of the hospitality of

others (Ross, 2008, p.170). Ross emphasises that the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is primarily about 'seeing the other' (2008, p.5). She shows that hospitality is about transformation. It begins, she argues, with seeing the other person and establishing a relationship. Christians are to see Christ in every guest and stranger. Seeing Christ in others breaks down barriers as all are seen as part of God's creation, a shared humanity (2008, p.171). This also means, according to Ross, giving people space to be who they were created to be in Christ, as well as seeing others in the same light. This, she argues, will help to prevent atrocities and support a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation (2008, p.171).

For Ross, hospitality is summed up through the idea of creating space (2008, p.173). She states that poverty of heart and mind creates space for the other. Poverty, in the sense of emptiness, makes a good host, she argues, because one is able to freely give and it reminds one of the importance of compassion and genuine love. This concept of 'space' links to the work of Volf (1995) and his understanding of the term 'embrace' which I read alongside the work of Ross (2008) in order to expand my understanding of this concept. Volf, a Croatian Protestant theologian, is best known for his work *Exclusion and Embrace* (1995) which grew out of his theological reflections on the Yugoslav Wars and the ethnic cleansing which occurred at this time. Volf defines an embrace in the following way,

In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become part of me while at the same time I maintain my own identity. By becoming part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace, none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.

(Volf, 1995, p.203)

This sense of poverty or having 'open arms' means that as a host, one needs to have space; to be in some sense empty.

The creation of space is a key concept for Ross, where she draws on the doctrine of the Trinity to explain its importance in Christian hospitality. She



asserts that the Trinity allows space, but only in relationship to one another: 'there is space to be each divine person, as each person relates to the other' (Ross, 2008, p.174).

Ross refers to an interpretation of the Andrei Rublev icon 'Holy Trinity' (c. 1410) which supports many of the ideas surrounding hospitality that she propounds. In particular, she highlights the fact that the Trinity in this icon is represented as open, again suggesting the idea of space and an 'open embrace'. In light of Ross's interpretation, I felt it important to undertake my own active contemplation of this icon in order to develop my own analysis and understanding of the image and whether it shed further light on the concept of mission as hospitality (Figure 7). With Ross's interpretation already in my mind I approached the artwork with this initial understanding and then thought about what the image suggested to me.

### **An Active Contemplation: Andrei Rublev, Holy Trinity (C.1410)**

*The icon most likely takes as its subject Abraham hosting three visitors which was an act of hospitality (The Bible, Genesis 18:1-15), and the metaphor of this visit as Abraham encountering the Trinitarian Godhead. The three persons of the Godhead are pictured seated around a table. There is food on the table suggesting purpose and fellowship. Rublev perhaps alludes to the Eucharist, and the importance of God as host of this meal in the Christian tradition. There is space between each person and also a space where the viewer is almost invited to sit at the table. There is a sense of welcome and invitation. This is supported by the open door of the house above the Father's head. There is a sense that this house is the ultimate goal of the Christian's journey, and the staff in each of the person's hand reinforces this notion of travelling on a spiritual journey. There is harmony between the three persons through the use of the colour blue and the halos behind each head. Yet, there are also distinctive differences between each person. For example, Jesus (in the middle) wears red, perhaps a reminder of spilt blood, and the tree behind him brings to mind the cross of crucifixion. Each of the three persons is not looking directly at each other and almost seem to be communicating with the viewer and both other persons in the picture at the same time. This suggests relationship with each other and communication with outsiders. Each of the persons has their head slightly bowed inwards, suggesting agreement with one another and a sense of peace.*

*The image can be viewed at:*

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg>

Figure 7: Active Contemplation (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

My own active contemplation (Figure 7) above reinforced the idea that hospitality is relational and promotes openness to others. Like Ross (2008) I was drawn to the space between the different persons of the Trinity and the invitation to the viewer to become part of the space.

Ross's favourite definition of hospitality is that of Henri Nouwen's, which states,

Hospitality...means primarily the creation of a free space where the

stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.  
Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where  
change can take place.

(Nouwen, 1998, p.49)

It is the possibility of change without enforcement which is potentially  
helpful within an education context, because it does not suggest conversion  
or even an expectation of change but rather an opportunity. Ross says,

We provide a welcoming space for the other; a space for them to  
come in, a space to feel at home and a space where we can be  
authentic in our humanity as witnesses to Christ and where the  
possibility of change is offered for the guest.

(Ross, 2008, p.176)

To conclude, Ross says this space will involve dialogue, and perhaps  
disagreement, humility and a true encounter with others. Space also  
requires lack of occupation. We like to occupy space with things, with noise  
and activity. Empty space is rare, it is always trying to be filled. Nouwen  
(1998) says that this leads people to feel uncomfortable with unanswered  
questions, and that people become preoccupied with solutions. Creating  
space reflects the Benedictine principles of a sense of complete openness  
achieved through real listening. So, creating space which provides  
opportunity for change would seem to be a key element of Christian  
hospitality, and the notion of an embrace begins to emerge as a useful  
analogy to express this.

### **The work of Henri Nouwen (1998) - hospitality as creation of space**

In light of my reading of Ross, I decided to study in more depth the work of  
Nouwen (1998) because the notion of space seemed to be an emerging  
theme. I wanted to deepen my understanding of and interpretation of this  
idea further. Nouwen writes extensively about creating space as an  
expression of the true host. The host creates the space where, as Nouwen  
says,

We can offer a space where people are encouraged to disarm  
themselves, to lay aside their occupations and pre-occupations and to  
listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their own

centre.

(Nouwen, 1998, p.52)

Nouwen is concerned that true space is open and not filled with assumptions. He believes strongly that space must allow those in it to grow and share their experiences of life through genuine communication and conversation (1998, p.60). Although primarily a theologian, Nouwen does write for the educator, so his work is particularly helpful in terms of my thesis because there is an interplay between theology and educational principles. Teachers, Nouwen says, should be seen as guides (1998, p.59), enabling children to pursue their search for knowledge and understanding. The teacher is key in enabling this open space to occur, and to model it. Nouwen describes it as 'learned ignorance' (1998, p.76).

Nouwen (1998) says the teacher is to reveal to their pupils that they have something to offer. It also means that the teacher takes on a sense of vulnerability as they too offer themselves to their pupils. All are included, all are equal. It is a fully inclusive space. The teacher is learner, and the learner is also teacher. The role of host and guest are merged, the teacher and pupil are both at the same time host and guest. In this sense, the space is truly hospitable. Nouwen says,

Teachers who can detach themselves from their need to impress and control and who can allow themselves to become receptive for the news that their students carry with them, will find that it is in receptivity that gifts become visible.

(Nouwen, 1998, p.61)

In this sense, hospitality is about being the host and guest. True hospitality is created when the two merge. This helps to overcome the tensions between conditional and unconditional hospitality.

Solitude is also an important notion for Nouwen which may seem to be in conflict with the idea of hospitality in terms of relationship. Nevertheless, for Nouwen, solitude is not the same as loneliness (1998, pp.17-19). Nouwen argues for a solitude of heart which is not dependent on physical isolation; a space where people can discover their inner vocation (1998, p.19). He maintains that there is a spiritual connection with others through a sense of

shared community. So there can be solitude within a shared space. It is in relation to this latter idea of shared space that Nouwen maintains that a spiritual life is characterised by a move from *hostis* (an enemy) to *hospes* (can mean host or guest) (1998 p.43). Nouwen argues for a space which is free and fearless, through a spiritual connection with one another.

This notion of solitude can be compared with the work of Lees (2012) who writes from an educational, not theological perspective. She highlights the importance of positive silence (2012). Lees explores the pedagogical value of silence as an organic practice. For Lees, silence is a place, feeling or experience (2012, p.7). It is not the absence of sound. Lees says silence has a purpose. This purpose she claims is about strengthening community through the creation of a psychological space (2012, p.13) in order to promote inclusion, democracy and self-awareness (2012, pp.105-6). This is very similar to Nouwen's notion of spiritual connection through solitude.

Lastly, Nouwen points out (1998, p.71) that true hospitality implies confrontation since there will be boundaries in the space. Hosts do not let guests use their home in any way they choose. Hosts' boundaries are linked to their values and their purpose. This reflects the Benedictine notion of maintaining distinctiveness yet being welcoming. Dialogue about the nature of the space created based on these values and purposes is important, so that the space allows collaboration to occur within it. The balance between receptivity and confrontation are the two sides of Christian witness according to Nouwen.

Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody.

(Nouwen, 1998, p.72)

So, to summarise, for Nouwen there is a balance to be maintained between completely open space and some form of boundary. There is also an emphasis here on the impossibility of neutrality, that everyone has a position with which they enter the space created. This is of particular importance to the RE teacher.

### **The work of Sarah York (2002) - hospitality as a way of being**

The concept of hospitality as 'being' was an emerging theme in Chapter Four. It has also already been put forward above in relation to the work of Nouwen. I therefore sought to deepen my understanding of this idea further. York is a former Unitarian minister and spiritual director based in the United States. I came across her work through engagement with the work of Trevor Cooling (2010). York (2002) talks more specifically about hospitality as a way of being (2002, p.47). Her primary work, *The Holy Intimacy of Strangers* (2002), explains how true hospitality allows people to cross the boundary of their own consciousness into that of the stranger, which gives them a different perspective. She maintains that people need to become more like children, who have a pure sense of trust which transcends fear and self-centredness. She says this takes people beyond a tribal mentality (2002, p.85), meaning that hospitality is about giving one's presence to another person. York claims that, for Christians, hospitality is less about what one does and more about who one is with other people (2002, p.158). It is about creating a state of being where people can be real and trust one another. Like Homan and Pratt (2007) she advocates the need to disarm fear, particularly post-9/11. She emphasises the inclusivity of hospitality through eating together reflecting on the Parable of the King's Feast (Matthew 22: 1-14) where she maintains social identities were shattered. York (2002, pp.180-181) makes reference to the work of Turner (1969), an anthropologist who uses the term *communitas* to describe what happens when a whole group of people cross a threshold together and enter an in-between (liminal) or threshold space. In this moment, the group glimpse the possibilities that exist between them and barriers become irrelevant. This reflects the 'Tent of Meeting' at St Ethelburga's (Cooling, 2010, p.66). One might describe this as an intense community spirit or sense of togetherness. York cites the moment the Berlin Wall came down as an example, and for her this is the ultimate expression of hospitality.

This vision of what one might call a 'hospitality utopia' is an ontological one. This ontological nature of hospitality is further supported by the work of Westfield (2001), a womanist theologian and educator. Womanist theology provides a religious conceptual framework emerging from the African American community predominantly in the USA with the aim of empowering and liberating women. I was drawn to this particular interpretation through

my work with the focus group because the teachers raised questions about the feminine and/or feminist nature of my research. Westfield contends that a womanist view of a host is one which does not just make a place for hospitality, but where the host's hospitality itself makes a place. It is about being the host, rather than making hospitality. Westfield was inspired by her memories of gathering around the kitchen table with her own mother, where banter, laughter, analysis and resilience were nurtured (2001, p.424). Westfield records putting herself in a vulnerable position with her own college students by sharing her own story as 'host' with her students, in order to encourage them to share their own stories (2001, pp.425-428). In this instance, Westfield, as teacher, shows that being the host is more important than making hospitality. She advocates the classroom as a meeting place for worldviews, where everyone approaches the table with their whole selves, which reflects her own mother's kitchen table (2001, p.429).

There is a clear indication through the literature reviewed so far that the ontological nature of Christian hospitality is an essential element to be considered in relation to my hypothesis.

### **The work of Arthur Sutherland (2006) and Luke Bretherton (2006) - hospitality as welcoming the other**

I have already indicated that welcome is a key aspect of hospitality through an analysis of the work of Ross (2008). However, Sutherland (2006), an American Jesuit theologian, sets out hospitality as welcome through an act of will. He states:

In the light of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and return, Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies or distressed, without regard for reciprocation.

(Sutherland, 2006, p. xiii)

Even for Sutherland there is a sense of the ontological nature of hospitality when he claims that hospitality is about Christians being people in the world and for the world (2006, p.xvii). He also claims that the theology of hospitality is rooted in understanding the nature of God, self and the world. His approach to hospitality is underpinned by the Parable of the Sheep and

the Goats (Matthew 25: 31-26). He shows how understanding Jesus as a homeless stranger and the empathy he had with humanity must serve in helping Christians today grasp the nature of hospitality (2006, p.21). Thus, when the parable talks about welcoming the stranger as welcoming Christ, Sutherland maintains that this is rooted in Christology, i.e the person and nature of Jesus. Drawing on the work of Karl Barth (1932-1962), Sutherland maintains that true hospitality is about a transformational encounter. For Barth, as for Sutherland, it is the encounter or meeting with Jesus Christ that characterises the Christian faith (Barth, 1949, p.17). Barth stresses the importance of Christian faith being a transformative decision (1949, p.28) and this is highlighted in the following example from Sutherland.

Sutherland's (2006) exposition of the contribution of Lydia (Acts 16: 13-15) to an understanding of hospitality shows that both she and the Apostle Paul learn from the experience of hospitality; they are transformed. Lydia opens her heart and her home, beyond some of the cultural norms (particularly in relation to the meeting of men and women) of the day. She makes particular decisions which affect her life. It is likely that Lydia's home, up until this point, was hidden from view as she herself was most likely an 'outsider' in Macedonia. Paul is persuaded to enter into a new relationship (with an unfamiliar culture) through Lydia's hospitality. Sutherland says that Lydia's initiation or baptism is an opportunity for Paul to experience *topophilia* - the affectionate response to a physical environment. For Sutherland, this is central to the concept of hospitality because *topophilia* means that there is symbolic depth in the episode, allowing a person to attribute sacredness to something ordinary. He maintains that the encounter is therefore a transformational one for both Paul and Lydia. It might also be described as a liminal encounter.

For Sutherland, encounters involve seeing others as they truly are, listening to them (although Sutherland uses the word 'hearing' which I suggest is not as intimate) and standing alongside them even if it is risky. Sutherland maintains that this removes the threat of fear, as it is rooted in love and reconciliation (2006, p.38). There is also a sense of responsibility in his understanding of hospitality (2006, p.xiv). This is highlighted by Jones (2007) who says that in Sutherland's work there is an emphasis on the host letting the guest feel at home and attending to their needs (2007, p.151).



This sense of welcome and encounter beyond just tolerance is also stressed by Bretherton (2006). Bretherton, a lecturer in theology and politics, explores how hospitality can provide a better way of framing relations with strangers, rather than tolerance (2006, p.5). He shows how hospitality moves beyond the realms of community cohesion which he claims presupposes tolerance, to the sphere of acceptance. His work is important within the context of RE as much has been written about the contribution of the subject to good community relations (Orchard, 2015). For example, RE can help to prepare pupils for life in a religiously and culturally diverse society (Miller, 2014). However, Bretherton suggests that tolerance is not rooted in theology and is also being increasingly questioned because of its narrow focus, and is therefore inadequate when considering a Christian approach to community relations (2006, pp.125-6). Bretherton takes a different parable to Sutherland as his focus, but draws the same conclusions. Undertaking an exegesis of the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), Bretherton intimates that hospitality is about extending an invitation to unworthy guests and to the marginalised. He maintains there is an open welcome to all with no reciprocity expected (2006, p.135). For Bretherton, the importance of welcoming the stranger as representing Christ is fundamental to an understanding of hospitality (2006, p.148). He stresses that this moves beyond tolerance to acceptance.

Therefore, Bretherton (2006) and Sutherland (2006) share a similar perspective in terms of hospitality as welcoming the other. They place an emphasis on no reciprocity being expected and focus on seeing Christ in others through transformational encounter.

### **A brief analysis of the work of Jacques Derrida (2000) - notions of conditional and unconditional hospitality**

At the end of Chapter Four, one emerging theme was the potential paradox of the unconditional and conditional nature of hospitality. It was for this reason that I undertook a brief analysis of Derrida's (2000) writings on this subject even though his focus is more philosophical in nature. I also drew upon other interpretations and readings of Derrida by Kevin O'Gorman (2006), Conrad Lashley (2008) and Tyler Kessel (2008). It should be noted that Derrida had experienced discrimination as a young man and when writing about hospitality he does so explicitly within the context of

immigration, even though he tended to refute any understanding of his work based on his personal life. Derrida says that absolute or unconditional hospitality is (almost) impossible; for Derrida hospitality is always conditional because it is essentially about benefiting the host (2000, p.77). He uses the term 'law of unlimited hospitality' to refer to the first (unconditional), and 'laws of hospitality' to refer to the second (conditional), thus making a distinction between the two. Derrida maintains that hospitality in the real world is conditional, although in his later works does suggest that unconditional hospitality may be possible, but only fleetingly and without our full knowledge.

O'Gorman, a social scientist, maintains that for Derrida, hospitality is defined as inviting and welcoming the stranger (O'Gorman, 2006, p. 51). O'Gorman asserts that, according to Derrida, for there to be absolute hospitality the guest must be allowed to behave as they wish, with no pressure to conform to any particular norms (2006, p.52). This would seem to conflict with the Benedictine notion that true hospitality requires boundaries to be in place. O'Gorman says that Derrida's later works suggest glimpses of absolute hospitality as a conceptual possibility, but that it can only be momentary.

O'Gorman suggests that Derrida's context has not always been taken into account by Derrida himself or others (2006, p.55). O'Gorman asserts that hospitality is not a matter of objective knowledge, but lived experience (2008, p.56). Thus, hospitality is not a phenomenon per se, but experiential. Therefore, to abstract hospitality from its reality means that one is unable to understand it fully. For O'Gorman, hospitality is understood through it being lived. This resonates with the views of Westfield (2001) and York (2002) and the notion of hospitality as being. This strengthens the notion that hospitality is primarily ontological in nature.

The notion of the conditional or unconditional nature of hospitality is explored by Kessel (2008) and Lashley (2008). Kessel (2008), in an analysis of American fiction, explores the possibility of absolute (unconditional) hospitality when the identity of guest and host are in question. Where the nature of host and guest are blurred, or where there is an ambiguous claim to being host, Kessel argues that absolute hospitality is possible (2008, p.190). This connects to the idea of interplay between

host and guest in the biblical narratives as outlined in Chapter Four. If one follows through Kessel's argument, then the biblical encounters where Jesus is both host and guest would provide examples of absolute hospitality.

Lashley (2008), a social scientist, raises the question as to whether reciprocity is the same as conditionality. For example, Lashley asks whether a reciprocal relationship is the same as a conditional one where obligations are to be met. Lashley considers the difference between hospitality and hospitableness. The difference lies, Lashley suggests, in motive. Being hospitable is not the same as true hospitality in his view. Being hospitable, according to Lashley, is about reciprocity, whereas true hospitality is unconditional (2008, p.73). Writing in relation to the tourist and hospitality industry, Lashley asserts that hosts must be driven by a desire to please the guest and meet the other's need, not by a sense of duty (2008, p.75). Meeting needs is therefore a sign of unconditional hospitality. Through a series of studies on 'memorable meals', Lashley shows that the emotional dimensions of a meal are more important than the quality of the food (2008, pp.77-78). The importance of well-being and meeting the emotional needs of guests is fundamental to the host-guest relationship.

These examples continue to highlight the complex nature of hospitality and whether unconditional hospitality is possible. These authors support the contention that the interplay of the host-guest relationship, the ontological nature of hospitality and the motive of the host lie at the heart of unconditional hospitality.

### **5.2.1 Emerging themes based on the review of conceptual literature relating to a theology of hospitality**

Based on my analysis of this selection of conceptual literature, a key theme to emerge is that of 'creating space' (Ross, 2008; Nouwen, 1998). This notion of space, however, is understood in very particular ways. The space is to be open, being both distinctive and inclusive. This means that a sense of community is implied, as the space welcomes others and provides opportunities for relationship (Homan and Pratt, 2007; Sutherland, 2006; Bretherton, 2006). The space is to allow for real listening. Listening is to be active and to allow the other person to tell their story (Ross, 2008; Sutherland, 2006; Nouwen, 1998). The sources suggest this will take place

through genuine encounter with others. A specific Christian understanding of this means an encounter with Christ through an engagement and interaction with the stranger. Thus, all encounters are to be viewed as encounters with Christ. There is also an indication that this creation of space is about being the host, not just about a physical space created or doing something for others. This suggests that hospitality is ontological in nature, it is about a sense of being, not just something that is done or created (O’Gorman, 2006; York, 2002; Westfield, 2001).

### **5.2.2 Application of these emerging themes to the purpose and place of religious education in Church of England schools**

In light of my literature review in Chapter Two, the Benedictine principles and the work of Ross (2008) could provide a way forward to maintain the distinctiveness of Church school RE whilst ensuring it is inclusive. Maintaining Christian distinctiveness is crucial for those working in Church schools and the Benedictine principle of hospitality provides a way to ensure that it is not lost, and perhaps becomes more real within a spirit of inclusiveness (Homan and Pratt, 2007, p. 43). The work of Ross (2008) shows how hospitality can help teachers of RE in Church of England schools to understand mission in a more inclusive way. If hospitality provides a conceptual framework for thinking about how (pedagogy) and what (curriculum) is taught in RE, this will enable classrooms to be inclusive and transformative and to develop the spiritual dimension in young people, without slipping into any form of confessionalism or faith formation. I find the embrace a helpful analogy when considering RE within the context of the Church’s mission. It enables one to see how Christian distinctiveness could be understood within an inclusive setting. The embrace, inclusive yet distinctive, provides a useful framework for Church schools because it allows the subject of RE to sit in relationship with the Christian mission of the church. RE can be distinct, yet part of an inclusive mission.

### **5.2.3 Application of these emerging themes to religious education pedagogical principles**

I now consider how these emerging themes may be applied to pedagogy in RE in order to begin to work towards a preliminary proposition in Chapter Six.

- **Creating Space for encounter and community where change can take place**

This is an essential element of hospitality for both Ross (2008) and Nouwen (1998), as well as reflecting the biblical analysis which emphasised the importance of encounter and subversive space. Therefore, in my thesis, one of the most important principles to consider is offering or creating space where change can take place. Although Ross interprets hospitality from a mission perspective, there is potential for using this understanding of creating space within a religious education context. A Church school is not about changing pupils, but offers pupils a space where change can take place. This change may be one of knowledge and understanding, but also of values and attitudes too. In addition, if we relate the notion of balance between cloister, community and hospitality (Homan and Pratt, 2007) to the RE classroom, it would indicate that there needs to be space for silence and aloneness, space to engage with one's own community (in relation to this thesis that could be the Christian community) and interaction with those of other faith and belief communities. It is a particular kind of space that is being created. It is to welcome the stranger (Sutherland, 2006; Bretherton, 2006) as well as provide space for solitude (Nouwen, 1998).

- **Listening to others through encounter and exchange of story**

The importance of listening permeates the rule of St. Benedict (Verheyen, 1949) and lies behind the work of all the theologians analysed. However, within the context of education, it is important to ask who one is listening to and what one is listening for. The analysis indicates that the 'who' takes place through encounter with others, particularly the stranger. Again, this reflects the biblical analysis and the emphasis on relationships. Within an RE context this might mean listening to different voices, not just the authoritative ones, but also those on the margins. For example, this might mean listening to dissenting voices, minority groups and considering the diversity of faith expression within particular belief systems.

Ross (2008) explains that the first mark of mission relating to proclaiming the good news involves hospitality of invitation, welcome and sometimes confrontation. This particularly resonates with the concept of 'encounter' which is evident in *Going for Growth* (2010). It suggests that encounters are

to be real, allowing for and engaging with differences including conflict of opinion. Listening to others through encounters will require both parties to tell their stories, allowing each other to be truthful and open. Ross (2008) indicates the fourth mark of mission is about social transformation. She claims this fits with the idea of hospitality from the margins, and resonates with the importance of making sense of religion and belief in the world, and understanding the impact that faith and belief have on individuals, communities and society. This provides much content for RE lessons, as well as suggesting principles of pedagogy that require genuine and authentic encounter with others. In addition, this understanding of hospitality resonates with the importance of developing an understanding of religious faith as the search for and expression of truth, and also the contribution RE may make to the development of pupils' own spiritual and philosophical convictions (Church of England, *Statement of Entitlement*, 2011, 2016).

The 'who' we are listening to is people with varied religious beliefs and those with none. However, through this process of listening, the listeners are listening *for* something. They are listening for knowledge and understanding of the other person, but they are listening for something more than this too. If the encounter is to provide the possibility of change, then I believe this is more than an intellectual activity. Therefore, I want to suggest that a useful term might be 'wisdom'. Through encountering others and listening to their stories, pupils will be listening for wisdom. In 2001, I wrote a short report entitled '*Removing the Bricks*' with support from The Farmington Institute. The notion of listening to others and change occurring is implied in this report. I talked about removing the bricks of ignorance, assumption and prejudice, i.e the walls we put around us. I argued that RE provided an effective vehicle through which to begin this. I ended this report by suggesting that this leads to wisdom, rather than just knowledge (2001, p.28). For me, education is not something passive where young people are vessels to be filled. The word 'educate' means to draw out or lead out. There is a sense of journey, of discovery. Wisdom, like hospitality, is more than objective knowledge. Wisdom is about knowledge and understanding, and about gaining insight and responding to what one has learned. It is about being changed.

- **The ontological nature of hospitality**

This selection of conceptual literature suggests that at least some aspects of the principles of pedagogy based on a theology of hospitality will be ontological in nature. By this I mean that the principles will be concerned with the 'being' or state of hospitality created by the host themselves. It is not just about the pedagogical principles but about who is 'living out' the pedagogy through their practice. It is about being the teacher or being the host. For example, it is not just about creating space, but being a presence. This notion also enables interplay between host and guest, which was one of the themes arising from the biblical analysis. Therefore, at this point I propose the idea of a 'lived pedagogy' as central to my developing proposition. By this I mean that the principles emerging from this thesis will be lived out by the teacher with pupils.

### **5.3 Developing my understanding of the use of a Christian theology of hospitality by educationalists in fields beyond religious education**

In this section I develop my understanding of the way in which educationalists have used a Christian theology of hospitality in other fields or settings e.g. in modern foreign languages, higher education. Unlike the previous section which sought to help me understand more comprehensively the Christian theology of hospitality, this section aimed to help me understand more deeply the potential connections between hospitality and pedagogy. After I have reviewed each piece of literature I summarise my developing understanding of the links between hospitality and pedagogy based on what I have read and analysed. At the end of this section I draw conclusions and apply my developing understanding to the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools, and in relation to preliminary pedagogical principles.

#### **The work of David Smith (2009) - hospitality and education**

Smith (2009) outlines a way forward for the teaching of cultural education within a Christian framework. He writes as a modern linguist, and is concerned for the teaching of modern foreign languages in schools.

Cooling (2010) has worked with and been influenced by the work of Smith and it was for this reason that I engaged with his understanding of hospitality in relation to education. Smith is Director of Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning in Canada.

My proposal here is that there is much to learn from this for the teacher of RE in a Church school. Smith begins by using the story of Abraham's encounter with King Abimelech (Genesis 20:1-18) to highlight areas in which educators might learn. To summarise, Abraham encounters Abimelech who is from a different culture to his own. Abraham says his wife Sarah is his sister. He does this to try and protect her because he assumes Abimelech is wicked. Abimelech wants to sleep with her, but according to the story God prevents him in a dream. Abimelech then moves to restore the relationship between them all.

Firstly, Smith highlights the sense of fear in this passage (2009, p.16). He states that every human community has unspoken rules, where there is a sense of vulnerability as a stranger. There is a sense of not being at home, of not sharing the native roots. Secondly, Smith shows how Abraham's sense of powerlessness works with fear to keep him and Sarah silent (2009, pp.17-18). Thirdly, Smith identifies partial knowledge as another way in which Abraham failed in his encounter (2009, pp.18-19). In the passage, Abraham bases his views on past experiences and hearsay which leads to misunderstanding and prejudice. The concept of fear of meeting the 'other' is an important thread in Smith's work, and reflects Sutherland's (2006) theology. Sutherland says that the traditional sense of hospitality has been lost. For example, he cites the increased interest in immigration laws and people wanting to protect themselves from strangers (2006, p.x). Finally, Smith suggests that Abraham has a limited spiritual horizon; he has put God in a box (2009, pp.20-22). Abraham assumes God is not present among the Philistines, that he is just located amongst his own people. Smith argues that there is a tendency for people to say that God is everywhere, but has his favourite chair in their own backyard. Therefore, people do not see God working in unexpected places in their community; in places where they think God shouldn't go perhaps. Smith maintains that people assume they know best and command a sense of superiority over others, whereas God has his presence in the margins of society.



Smith summarises his views by explaining that when these four aspects work together they bring a curse on others. Fear, powerlessness, partial knowledge and having a limited spiritual horizon mean that Abraham brings trouble on himself and others, which Smith calls a 'curse'. Abraham misreads the situation, causing suffering and emotional pain. Smith maintains that this passage must be understood by educators, particularly those involved in cultural and language education. He says educators must help young people be a blessing and strive to remove fear.

In light of this as a linguist, Smith stresses the importance of intercultural communication in schools in order to help young people become a blessing. Smith contends that when we look at ourselves we tend to argue that we are the 'norm' (2009, pp.26ff). By this he means that when we see different or puzzling, sometimes shocking, activities or behaviours that others might take part in, we judge them against our sense of normality. In many ways it is not just behaviours that shape culture, but also the meaning and value that we assign to things around us. What we think about our surroundings is culturally learned. Smith argues that we hear and see things in different ways. We are conditioned by cultural learning. We can look at the same thing and see it differently. We see a situation as we want to see it, not in its reality.

To illustrate this, I will draw an analogy from the *The BFG* by Roald Dahl (1982, pp.56-61). Sophie and the BFG have a conversation about frobscottle. This drink which the BFG likes to consume is to Sophie unusual in that the bubbles in the drink travel downwards and therefore cause the drinker to break wind (a whizz popper) instead of burp. In this episode it is evident that Sophie has cultural assumptions about the nature of carbonated drinks which means that she finds the BFG's drink unconventional. The BFG too, though, is surprised by Sophie's suggestion that the bubbles should go downwards, he says this is a 'disatrophe catastrophe'. This fictional piece illustrates Smith's assertion that we all tend to argue for a 'norm', we judge others against our own sense of normality.

In addition, from a Christian perspective Smith stresses the importance of 'not conforming to the patterns of this world' (Romans 12:2). This verse suggests that Christians are to reject worldly values and to 'let God

transform them into a new person by changing the way they think' (Romans 12:2). This means that the foundation for a Christian approach to culture should be motivated by love, forgiveness, reconciliation - the key elements of the gospel message of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. These are expressed through Jesus' personal encounters with people as evidenced in the gospels, which show the overcoming of cultural and gender boundaries (Smith, 2009, p.57).

Smith expounds the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) maintaining that we need to realise we can learn from other cultures and that God is at work in them (2009, pp.59ff). According to Smith, Christians should not take a superior view because it marginalises many people in society. Smith maintains that this approach is a compassionate one that crosses the boundaries of culture. It is fundamentally about humility. For Smith, love too is a guiding value because human beings are relational. He claims that to be a Christian is primarily to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Therefore, this is to be a driving force in the approach one takes to learning about others.

Smith take this focus on humility and love a step further and uses the analogy of a tourist when discussing cultural education (2009, p.85). The tourist, he argues, wants to see the sites and monuments, rather than engaging with the people themselves. Being a true visitor would mean engaging in conversation, listening and interacting. There are some connections between Smith's notion of a true visitor and an interpretive pedagogy referred to in Chapter One. This primarily ethnographic approach to RE, aims to understand religion from the inside, engaging with real people and real faith. Smith says engagement means moving from being a tourist who wants to take a photograph of someone, to being a true visitor who stands alongside the person and wants to begin to learn (2009, p.86). Tourism is about the self, whereas being a true visitor is about others. Smith uses the term 'learning with' others (2009, p.120) and refers to Volf's embrace metaphor here to indicate that this may be one way of imagining an intercultural encounter (2009, p.121).

For Smith, hospitality, humility and listening are entwined in seeking a way forward for cultural education (2009, p.122). Smith sums this up by saying

that being hospitable and loving the stranger is realising that all are in fact strangers (2009, p.121). This echoes the biblical understanding of hospitality where Jesus is both guest and host. He moves from the outside to the inside, from being a guest to being host. In turn, this means that people understand themselves more after they become the stranger. Smith illustrates this through the biblical account of Peter's interaction with Cornelius (Acts 10:30-25). In this narrative, Smith suggests that learning takes place on both sides as they engage in mutual acts of hospitality as host and guest.

To summarise, Smith (2009) suggests that relationships, genuine encounter and coming alongside others are essential in intercultural, and subsequently in modern foreign language education, if a Christian approach is to be taken. He also indicates that there is a blurring of the role of host and guest and an interplay between them.

### **The work of Parker J Palmer (1993, 2007) - hospitality as a metaphor for teaching**

Whilst Smith applies theology to cultural education, Palmer (2007) begins with the teacher themselves and moves on to use the Christian concept of hospitality as a metaphor for good teaching. Palmer, a sociologist and Quaker, writes extensively on issues relating to education, spirituality and leadership. I chose to analyse his work as he was referred to by those writing about the theology of hospitality and because he also writes about pedagogy.

There are immediate connections in Palmer's work with those of York (2002) and the notion of hospitality as being. For Palmer teaching is about the 'who', it is about the teacher and who they are (2007, p.4). Palmer writes about weaving a fabric of community where the teacher, students and subject are woven together. He maintains that a good teacher weaves a web of connectedness where they connect themselves and the subject with the students (2007, pp.13ff). The teacher is to maintain their integrity and identity, and acknowledge that objective truth is of no more value than personal truth (2007, p.18). Palmer maintains that sometimes the teacher puts up barriers to avoid putting themselves in a vulnerable position because objective facts are seen as more important than personal truth. He suggests that this can turn teaching into a performance. Palmer indicates

that the teacher should weave the strand of their own identity into teaching (2007, p.16). Palmer says that teachers must return to the passion that called them to teach, using the language of vocation in his writings to emphasise this (2007, pp.19ff). The language Palmer uses suggests that of teacher as host: a host who is open, vulnerable and self-aware; a host who maintains their own integrity and identity and tells their own story.

In a similar way to Smith (2009), Palmer focuses on the issue of fear in the classroom; the fears of both teachers and pupils. Teachers he says are fearful of conflict, poor results or losing face; pupils he argues are fearful of an adult world, being embarrassed and of failure (2007, pp.36ff). Palmer (2007) intimates that an interconnectedness through narrative and story flies against the culture in education today which is dominated by grading systems, fragmentation of knowledge and competition. Palmer says pupils remain silent to protect themselves and survive in a competitive world. It is in relation to fear that Palmer speaks of the importance of listening:

A good teacher is one who can listen to students' voices before they have spoken...this means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honouring the other. Not rushing to fill silences, not trying to coerce students into saying things...it means entering empathetically into the students' world.

(Palmer, 2007, p.47)

For Palmer, it is essential for the teacher to enter empathetically into the student world, so that the students see the teacher as someone who hears their voices. Palmer maintains that this will benefit the students, but also the teacher. The teacher's hospitality to the students results in a world more hospitable to the teacher says Palmer:

Good teaching is an act of hospitality toward the young, and hospitality is always an act that benefits the host even more than the guest.

(Palmer, 2007, p.51)

This implies that hospitality cannot be unconditional, as it benefits the teacher and the student. As a result of this understanding of hospitality, Palmer puts forward a new way of knowing through shared community. He

maintains that, 'to teach is to create a space in which community of truth is practiced' (Palmer, 2007, p.97). He stresses the importance of interconnectedness with others focused around a common subject. The community centres itself around the subject which is to be understood through communicating with one another. He understands truth as an eternal conversation about things that matter. He sees truth as being about enquiry, dialogue and discourse, maintaining that this is not relativism saying, 'the subject itself knows itself better than we can ever know it... the subject offers itself to us' (Palmer, 2007, p.109).

This approach is similar to a hermeneutical one because as interpretations of the subject take place understanding develops. This community approach allows for diversity of views and creative conflicts. Palmer is adamant that this means more than just have a conversation. Therefore, Palmer's argument (2007, pp.55ff) is that the subject must be the focus of learning, what he calls 'the great thing'. He argues that in terms of pedagogy this means that neither the teacher dominates nor the student. He argues for a path between a didactic approach and a facilitator approach, whereby the subject is the focus of attention. The subject, in this case the narrative, is allowed to speak. The subject is allowed to have a voice; a story is offered or a practice explored. Palmer uses a hub and spokes of a wheel to explain the relationship between the subject and the pupil. He argues that the subject is like the hub of a wheel, whereby the students move out into the spokes to do research and return to the hub to ask more questions (2007, p.129). He also argues that the subject must be allowed to speak to the students and should be about real life. I have created a diagram to illustrate this (Figure 8).

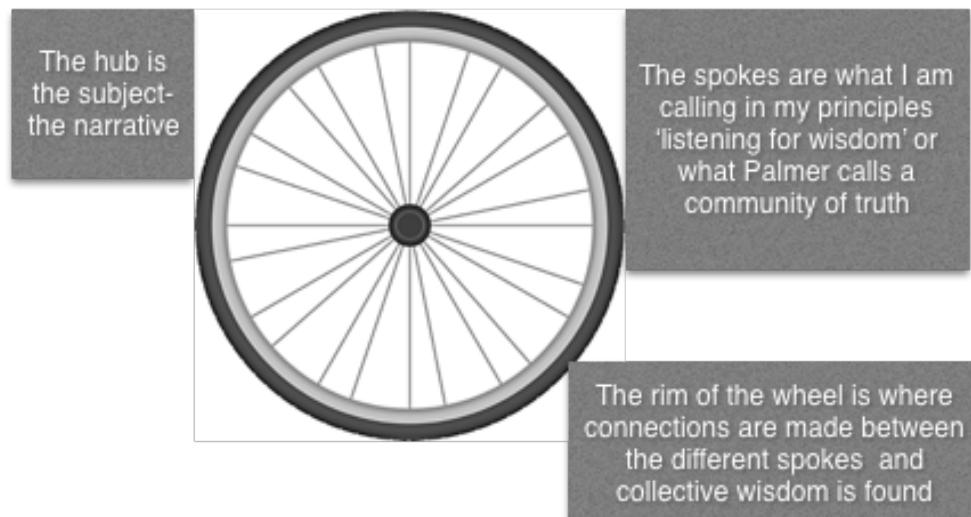


Figure 8: The relationship between the subject and the students based on the work of Palmer (2007) (Kathryn Wright 2016)

Palmer maintains that knowing is only possible through relationship, that knowing alters and changes through communal interaction. He suggests that objectivity is not possible and leads to teacher-centred classrooms where the teacher becomes the expert, rather than the community of learners listening for truth. In addition, he also suggests that relativism leads to student-led classrooms, where the students are at the centre rather than the subject. Palmer uses an analogy from Ancient Greek drama. He says that, unlike the Greeks, we see knowledge as something other than ourselves, something 'out there'. We are, if you like, spectators of a play, we relate to it from the perspective of an audience. However, he maintains, the Greek audiences were able to put themselves in the play, to participate within it (Palmer, 1993, p.22). He suggests that teachers and pupils are to be 'in community' with what they are learning. This is very similar to Smith's (2009) notion of being a true visitor and not just a tourist. It also reflects my own hermeneutical approach to this thesis.

In summary, Palmer's work suggests that the teacher is a host who creates space for listening and interacting with the subject and one another. His use of hospitality indicates that he sees teaching as a communal, relational activity where discovery takes place where the host and guests are interdependent on one another.

### **The work of Jane McAvoy (1998) and Letty Russell (1993) - hospitality and education in feminist perspectives**

I came to this literature as a result of questions raised in my focus group about the notion of embrace and whether this reflected a feminine and/or feminist worldview. Although not a major theme arising through my focus group, it made me reflect on my own worldview and made me question whether in fact I was bringing a feminist or feminine perspective to my research without realising it. In light of this, I specifically analysed literature which gave a feminist perspective on both hospitality and education. I wanted to see if they provided a particular viewpoint or insights that I was not already aware of, and to consider if my own personal perspectives were reflected in them. I have already touched on some womanist perspectives in relation to the nature of a theology of hospitality, however here I explore the contribution of two writers in relation to feminist approaches to theological education based on the notion of hospitality.

McAvoy (1998), a theologian, bases her work on the lived experience of women undertaking theological studies in an American seminary. She asserts that women lack confidence because of the way theological education in her seminary was set up. She says this leads to women silencing themselves, to avoid being challenged or threatened (1998, p.21). McAvoy (1998) asserts that these feelings are rooted in the sin of self-contempt, and explores the work of medieval mystic Julian of Norwich to arrive at insights into how this sin of self-contempt may be overcome. McAvoy concludes that enabling a process of contrition (repentance) and supporting a compassionate environment of growth are key to effective theological education for women. It is here that she turns to hospitality as a way forward in transforming theological education for women.

Drawing on a range of sources she puts forward the notion of a hospitable space for the development of women's theological voices (1998, p.23). She asserts that the teacher must realise that she can learn from her students. She calls this 'intellectual hospitality' whereby one lets go of the control of knowledge in order to facilitate the thinking of the students (1998, p. 23). This is not specifically feminist as it reflects the work of both Nouwen (1998) and Ross (2008). McAvoy (1998) shows through practical examples and experience that the classroom is a forum to exemplify this hospitable

approach as it provides a safe space for encouragement and reflection. The focus, like Palmer's is on the community of learners (including the teacher) participating together and responding to one another. In particular, McAvoy is interested in the 'stranger's' voice and how teachers can effectively challenge the dominant voice in a community of learners. She suggests that this involves an act of will from the teacher (1998, p.24). McAvoy concludes that educators (from a Christian perspective at least) must approach the classroom with a spirit of repentance acknowledging where their settings may be inhospitable and working towards improvement. For McAvoy, living out an educational climate of hospitality is essential for successful theological education in her seminary (1998, p.25). This concept of living out hospitality strengthens the argument that it is about being and not doing. It is ontological.

This notion of intellectual hospitality is also considered by Gallagher (2007) in relation to higher education in the USA. Whilst not writing from a feminist perspective, his conclusions are similar. He argues that intellectual hospitality means having an ethic which encourages open-minded curiosity (2007, p.137). Gallagher says,

Teaching effectively becomes a process of hospitably orchestrating multiple and diverse opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have accurately 'heard' the issues, questions, and problems that have been articulated in an ongoing conversation, and that they are able to add their own voices to the discussion in a way that is simultaneously appreciative, respectful and analytically critical.

(Gallagher, 2007, p.139)

For Gallagher, the teacher becomes a gracious host who is attentive to the needs of their students and is able to facilitate conversations between them in such a way that all are welcomed (2007, p.139).

McAvoy's assertions are supported by the work of Russell (1993) who takes a feminist liberation approach to educating for justice. Russell maintains that hospitality creates a safe and welcoming space for people to find their own sense of humanity and worth (1993, p.173). There is a sense of unity without uniformity, where diversity and particularly those on the margins are welcomed in a hospitable place. Drawing on biblical narratives



such as Abraham entertaining the three strangers (Genesis 18), and the disciples welcoming a stranger on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-25), Russell shows that the process of offering hospitality creates a new relationship between people; it creates community and overcomes obstacles of exclusion (2004, cited in Brady, 2008, p.194). For Russell, the primary aim of education is to mend creation and bring hope. She asserts that hospitality has an important part to play within this vision (1974, cited in Brady 2008, p.194).

Although not writing from a feminist perspective, the relationship between inclusion and hospitality is developed further by Hedge-Goettl (2002), a Presbyterian pastor. She has attempted to do this by exploring the theology of inclusion which she claims should be rooted in hospitality and *hesed* (covenant love). She examines the inclusion of people with disabilities within faith communities as opposed to school settings, however, her conclusions are interesting in terms of how hospitality may function as a useful metaphor for inclusive practice. Hedges-Goettl maintains that the Old Testament requires God's people to go beyond a traditional understanding of hospitality, and to show the nature of God's grace (2002, p.23). She says that hospitality is dependent on relationship because there must be someone to whom one is being hospitable. She refers to Jesus as being both host and guest, particularly in relation to the Messianic banquet. She maintains that Christians should bring both together in a true community where they are both host and guest (2002, p.26).

In summary, the feminist perspectives do not offer a unique position on hospitality, instead they reinforce the key themes already identified. The notion of a community of learners where people interact with one another in an inclusive space is paramount. However, these themes are also developed by writers who do not come from a feminist perspective. Likewise, the focus on 'being hospitable' is a theme in the feminist writings, but is not unique. Therefore, I maintain that whilst writing as a woman, my perspective is not a particularly feminist one. It has no doubt shaped my own cultural and personal worldview, but I have not set out to provide a specifically feminist viewpoint.

### **Hospitality as a metaphor or analogy in other fields of education**

The sources in this field were particularly limited, but it was important to me

to see how others had used the notion of hospitality within an educational setting. I was reliant on a small number of journal articles which met the criteria for selection. Higgins (2007) works within the field of community arts, and explores the notion of hospitality within community music. He draws on the work of Derrida (2000), and recasts the notion of community through a Derridean understanding of hospitality. Higgins asserts that there is a tension between 'creating an embracing welcome' and the conditional nature of joining a community music group (2007, pp.283-4). For Higgins, Derrida's understanding of conditional hospitality is helpful because it reflects more accurately the nature of community as a place where openness, diversity, freedom and tolerance flow (2007, p.284). Higgins cites a case study of the Peterborough Community Samba Band as an act of hospitality. He maintains that this community project forms a sense of identity whilst also preparing themselves as a group for new arrivals. Thus, Higgins argues the group is 'porous, permeable and open-ended' (2007, p.290) and works towards unconditional hospitality but never achieves it. This mirrors the Benedictine concept of an open, yet bounded, space for hospitality. It is also worth noting the use of word 'embrace' as part of Higgins' understanding of welcome (2007, pp.283-4) which supports my own developing use of the term in this thesis.

Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock (2009) explore hospitality as a practice in their college writing courses in higher education in the USA. They specifically engage with hospitality as lived experience, not as a philosophical construct. They begin by examining ways in which hospitality in higher education is misunderstood as trade, knowledge-dispensing or caring. In these scenarios students are not seen as guests, but largely as consumers or patients (2009, p.711). They consider three modes of hospitality - the warrior or Homeric, Judeo-Christian, and nomadic - and how these may relate to teaching and learning. They map practices such as setting objectives, completing assignments and assessment against the three modes of hospitality, and show that Homeric hospitality with its focus on group work aimed at a public goal is the best fit for pedagogy in their setting (2009, pp.717-720). However, they question its validity in the current educational climate and pursue an approach which they call 'transformative' hospitality, but which is very similar to the concept of intellectual hospitality cited above. This means that the teacher is

themselves put at risk and is willing to change. The teacher opens up themselves, in a similar way to that advocated by Westfield (2001) and Palmer (2007). In addition, they indicate the need to retreat to the margins of society, and potentially to a place of vulnerability (2009, pp.722-23). For example,

If the hospitable classroom sounds outmoded...maybe that is all the more reason to keep it, on the margins and as a retreat. In a world that often functions by separating guest and host, and this includes the world of higher education, there is some argument in recommending that teachers and their students simply go contrary.

(Haswell, Haswell and Blalock, 2009, p.723)

In summary, these specific educational perspectives add further layers of understanding in relation to hospitality as lived experience and the notion of intellectual hospitality, i.e. in the sense of having an open mind. They also emphasise the importance of meeting those on the margins and embracing all.

### **5.3.1 Emerging themes based on my understanding of how a Christian theology of hospitality is used by other educationalists**

Based on my analysis of this second selection of conceptual literature the ontological nature of hospitality is particularly evident (Palmer, 1993, 2007; McAvoy, 1998; Russell, 1993) There is a sense that the teacher as host is crucial in terms of understanding what this might mean in the classroom. This also implies that the teacher themselves is to be vulnerable in sharing their story and in being intellectually open. They are also to be self-aware, knowing their own 'norms' and the lens that they look through to view the world. However, a number of writers also suggest that the teacher is both host and guest, and promote an interplay between them which reflects the biblical narratives. The creation of a 'safe space' emerges where the teacher is able to be both a host and guest because they can hold positive tension between their own self-worth and their vulnerability.

The relational nature of teaching is stressed by nearly all the educationalists analysed in this sample. This means that dialogue and community should be central elements in any pedagogy developed. However, Smith (2009) and Palmer (2007) take this further and suggest

that learning takes place best when one comes alongside the other, when real, true encounter takes place. Smith (2009) suggests that this encounter means 'going through the window' or becoming less of a tourist, whereas Palmer (2007) puts forward the notion of allowing the 'subject' to speak in a community of truth. Both of these ideas suggest that any pedagogy should be based on an intellectual openness towards what is being learned, and enabling real, true understanding of others (e.g. beliefs, practices) to take place.

### **5.3.2 Application of these emerging themes to religious education pedagogical principles**

I now consider how these emerging themes may be applied to pedagogy in RE in order to begin to work towards a preliminary proposition in Chapter Six.

- **The teacher (and pupil) as vulnerable**

For the RE teacher, being aware of one's own (and the pupils') vulnerability is particularly important as the subject itself can touch the deepest of human emotions and asks the fundamental question 'who am I?' Smith (2009) speaks of vulnerability in a negative sense. He questions whether there is a sense that our children feel like vulnerable strangers in our classrooms. He suggests that as teacher-hosts we have unspoken rules of engagement; that we are not fully aware of the vulnerability of the children we work with when we ask them to contribute or share an experience. These are searching questions for any teacher, but particularly for those involved in religious education where existential questions are being asked. This raises questions about power and powerlessness in our classrooms. Questions may be asked about whether teachers wield power simply by the way they set up a classroom or whether some children and young people feel powerless to communicate. Palmer (2007) on the other hand puts forward the notion of vulnerability in a positive way. He suggests that this means being intellectually open and telling one's own story with pupils. Thus, the teacher places themselves into a place of vulnerability. The teacher-host in this sense becomes the guest. If this approach is taken, then it would help to overcome the negative aspects of vulnerability, as the line between teacher and pupil, host and guest are blurred. This means that both the teacher and pupil, host and guest can be vulnerable in a positive

sense. The notion of creating space underpins this theme as it enables vulnerability to be within a safe place.

- **The teacher (and pupil) as self-aware**

In many of our classrooms, children may begin with their knowledge of religion and belief which is influenced by the media, celebrity culture and the like. Thus, before we begin exploring religion, children may have stereotypical views, or at worse have developed prejudice against a particular group or belief. According to Smith (2009), this means that we not only need to become self-aware, but also be aware of (have knowledge of) and learn about cultural norms that govern particular religious or belief groups we might be studying in RE. Self-awareness is vital, as it enables people to see their own culture and beliefs in a more sensitive way and able to reflect on their behaviour and values more openly. This is essential if an effective environment for learning is to be created (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012, p. 20).

- **Coming alongside through in-depth encounter, understanding of and learning with others**

Knowledge too, Smith (2009) asserts, is a fundamental element of hospitality. However, he has a particular type of knowledge in mind. It is knowledge of invisible social and cultural rules, as well as beliefs and this is particularly important in the RE classroom. If we approach RE through a particular cultural lens then this will have implications for the curriculum and pedagogy. In my experience, within RE the focus is too often on the activities and behaviours of people of faith - the visible - rather than on the invisible, that is the theology and belief (Chipperton et al., 2016). In recent years, the analogy of looking through a window has been used for 'learning about' religion. I am no longer sure this is helpful as it implies that we are looking from the outside onto something 'different' or 'exotic' with our own lens shaping and framing it. I am not asserting that one can escape culture and 'uncreate' a norm, rather that we need to give active acknowledgement to this. This means that one must state clearly the lens or frame shaping the 'learning about' or take a completely different approach which ensures that norms are not only acknowledged but owned and challenged. A hermeneutical approach, such as that being used in this research, would sit comfortably within this.

This has implications for the Church school, and RE in particular. Taking this approach within RE in Church schools might mean a rethink in terms of what the curriculum looks like. It would mean less a focus on the visible elements of religion and more a focus on the invisible beliefs, concepts and values that enable us to understand what motivates and shapes human beings. The emphasis in RE, I suggest, would be about understanding and appreciating others, through a deeper exploration of questions of meaning, purpose and truth. This would also mean a better balance in the curriculum between the theological, philosophical and lived reality of religion (Chipperton et al., 2016). It means that within RE we must be prepared to 'learn from' religion in a very different way. It is about widening the spiritual horizon, and being humble in how we approach other faith and belief traditions. It is about staying secure within one's own beliefs, and learning from as well as learning about cultures and beliefs. Learning about can be seen as 'safe'. It encourages the learner to be objective, to look from the outside. Learning from is riskier. It requires the learner to truly engage with others, to enter into relationship. This requires a change of mindset and attitude. It means that the driver for pedagogy is relational. It also means that 'learning from' becomes active; by this I mean that the learner becomes more religiously literate through an authentic encounter with faith and belief. They do not merely express their own opinion, but are open to the possibility of change. The word wisdom is helpful again here, as it suggests that the learning is applied to daily life.

One begins to wonder whether in RE we are still a bit like tourists. We happily observe what religious people do, including Christians, rather than really engaging in meaningful in-depth conversation about what matters, about what it means to be human and what impact this has on people's lives. RE which enables a true encounter with faith, with real people, with questions that puzzle and challenge us, is essential in the current global climate. Therefore, I suggest we move from 'looking through the window' to 'being on the other side of the window'. We learn with others, rather than about or from them.

This connects with recent calls from within and beyond the RE community for a focus on religious literacy (for example, reports including *RE for Real*, 2015; *Living with Difference*, 2015). If children do not have the theological and religious language to interpret and communicate their ideas, then they

will not be able to understand the depth of meaning of faith and belief for members of faith communities. Therefore, I suggest that time spent on developing an understanding of theological language and symbolism may be one aspect of learning with others.

#### **5.4 Issues arising from the conceptual literature review**

There are three particular issues I have identified through this conceptual literature review. These relate to the context of some of the literature, my own worldview and the continued paradoxical nature of conditional and unconditional hospitality.

The first issue is the reliance on a large number of American/Canadian scholars. This is a challenge because the American/Canadian context both in terms of education and in terms of understanding theology in a secular society is different from the United Kingdom. In the United States many colleges and universities started as seminaries to train the clergy, and many of these still exist. Christian education in North America is understood largely in terms of faith-based schools and colleges. By this I mean they often aim to nurture young people in their faith and teach from a Christian perspective. They are about faith formation. In North America theology is largely something understood from within a faith tradition, it is not something that those outside a particular faith tradition would tend to engage with. This is different in the United Kingdom where, for example, theology is a subject that is studied by those of faith or no faith. In addition, RE as perceived in a school setting in the United Kingdom is not taught in North America. The implications for my thesis are that this different context must be taken into account when deciding if the themes can lead into pedagogical principles that will be applied in a new context i.e. in Church of England schools in the United Kingdom.

A second issue relates to the feminist or feminine nature of my thesis. As a woman, I have read both the biblical narrative and the conceptual literature through a feminine lens. The focus group also raised questions about the feminist or feminine nature of the three pedagogical principles that I put forward in Chapter Six. However, the themes arising from my reading of feminist perspectives suggest that they are not unique, but rather themes that arise from other perspectives, too, including those written by men. Therefore, this would suggest that whilst acknowledging the use of what

some might call feminine language, the principles of pedagogy proposed are not in themselves feminist.

Lastly, the question as to whether the principles of pedagogy are based on conditional or unconditional hospitality remains. However, as indicated in the biblical analysis, the tension between these does not need to be negative. They can be held together as a positive paradox. Higgins' (2007) notion of community as conditional hospitality but striving for unconditional hospitality even if unobtainable is helpful when considering its application to the RE classroom.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

In this chapter I have analysed conceptual literature and added layers of interpretation to my understanding of a theology of hospitality and how it may relate to religious education in Church of England schools. As a result, the following themes have emerged:

- Creating space for encounter and community where change can take place
- Listening to others through encounter and exchange of story
- The ontological nature of hospitality
- The teacher (and pupil) as vulnerable
- The teacher (and pupil) as self-aware
- Coming alongside through in-depth encounter, understanding of and learning with others.

These themes, alongside those identified in Chapter Four, are now developed into a preliminary proposition in Chapter Six.



## **Chapter 6: A preliminary proposition**

This chapter sets out my preliminary proposition. This proposition outlines how a theology of hospitality may provide clarity in terms of the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools, and also puts forward initial suggestions for three principles of pedagogy. These principles were not developed fully at this stage so that I could be open to the refining and shaping process of the focus group study.

I bring together the analysis of the biblical narratives (Chapter Four) relating to a theology of hospitality and the conceptual literature review (Chapter Five) to put forward my preliminary proposition. This draws on the emerging themes and developing interpretations identified in these two chapters. This preliminary proposition puts forward:

- a new way of understanding the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools and how it relates to the Christian mission of the Church of England.
- a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools.
- the concept of a lived pedagogy.

### **6.1 A new way of understanding the purpose and place of religious education in Church of England schools**

Drawing particularly on the work of Ross (2008), Smith (2009), Palmer (1993, 2007) and Volf (1996), the concept of an embrace in understanding the relationship between the distinct Christian mission of the church and the role of RE seemed worth pursuing. In addition, if mission was understood in terms of hospitality, as Ross (2008) proposed, it provided a way forward for conceptualising the purpose and place of RE in Church schools without it becoming a form of faith formation. At this stage of my research the use of the term 'embrace' was tentative. I was unsure how others, particularly teachers, would react to my use of the term in an educational context. Therefore, the use of an embrace as an analogy formed part of the focus group discussions.

## 6.2 A theoretical framework for religious education pedagogy in Church of England schools

I now set out three draft principles which I assert should lie at the heart of a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools. I have chosen three principles for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is important for teachers to have succinct principles that are easily memorable. Three principles provide teachers with a clear and concise way forward. Secondly, the outcomes of the analysis in Chapters Four and Five led clearly to these particular areas of focus. The emerging themes were easily grouped into three areas and then titles sought for each one as a result. I now show how I have grouped these themes and then shaped each preliminary principle as a result.

The three principles to emerge are:

- Creating Space.
- Encountering Christ through encountering others.
- Listening for wisdom.

All three principles are directly rooted in a theology of hospitality and all are required for effective pedagogy in religious education.

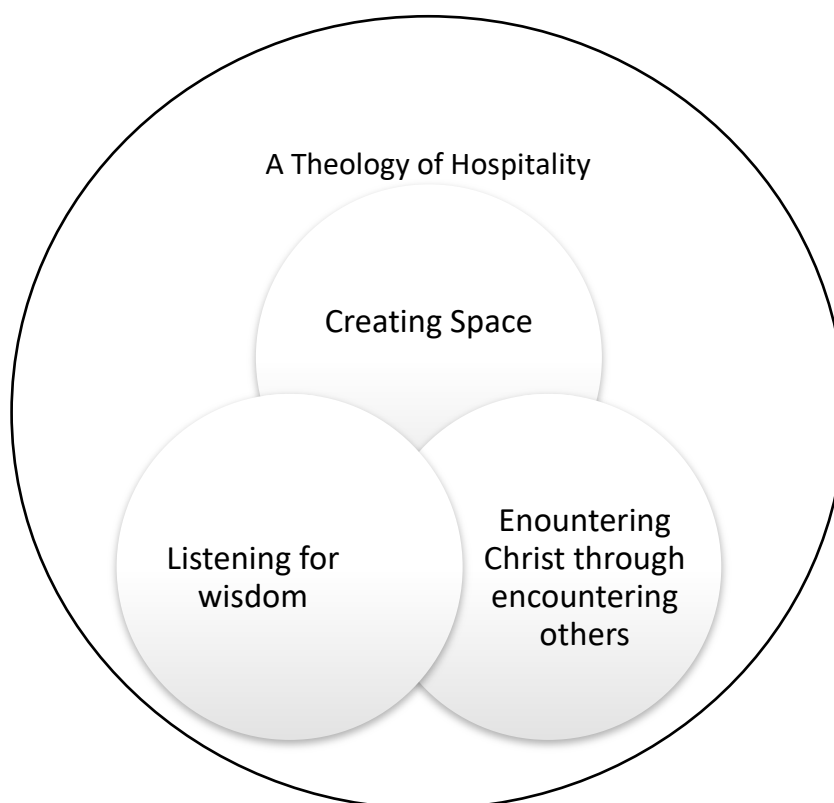


Figure 9:  
A diagram  
showing the  
three  
pedagogical  
principles within  
a theological  
framework  
(Kathryn Wright,  
2017)

I take each in turn and explain how the principles were developed.

### **6.3 Creating Space**

This principle is rooted in both the biblical narrative (Chapter Four), but particularly in the conceptual literature review (Chapter Five). It is based on the following emerging themes:

- Meeting the needs of all, including the notion of subversive space.
- The conditional and unconditional nature of hospitality.
- Creating space for encounter and community where change can take place.
- Openness which is both distinctive and inclusive.
- The teacher (and pupil) as self-aware.
- The teacher (and pupil) as vulnerable.

This principle underpins the other two principles. It is essential for this principle to be applied for the other two to work in practice. The analysis suggests that this space needs to have particular characteristics. In particular, it needs to be transformative and inclusive. It needs to be a place where there are opportunities for change to occur for all those who sit within the space. It needs to be open physically, emotionally and intellectually. This applies to the teacher as well as the pupil. This means that 'norms' are acknowledged and all are self-aware. This also means that the space can be a place where risks are taken, and where deep questions and truths can be explored and challenged safely.

### **6.4 Encountering Christ through encountering others**

This principle is founded on emerging themes which are rooted particularly in the biblical narrative (Chapter Four) and reinforced through the conceptual literature (Chapter Five). In addition, this principle resonates with the purposes of RE identified in the Church of England documentation (Chapter Two). It is shaped by these particular themes:

- Encountering God's presence which leads to transformation.
- Listening to others through encounter and exchange of story.

- Importance of the covenant relationship.
- Creating space for encounter and community where change can take place.
- ‘Coming alongside’ through in-depth encounter, understanding of and learning with others.

In the biblical narratives, there was a strong sense of encountering God’s presence through meals and hospitality. The importance of an encounter with Christ was also an important element of Church of England reports relating to mission (2001, 2010). In addition, the conceptual literature review suggests that encountering others is important in terms of genuine and authentic engagement with religion and belief in the contemporary world. This means encounters involve dialogue and listening, and enable those in the encounter to learn from one another. These encounters support an ethnographic approach such as the interpretive pedagogy advocated by Jackson (1997). The encounter should enable those taking part to understand and come alongside each other. This means that the pupil is enabled to ‘go through the window’. This implies developing an understanding of theological language and symbolism so that one can communicate appropriately and appreciate the meaning of beliefs that others express. It also means encountering those on the margins, as a Christian theology of hospitality implies justice and meeting with those who are on the fringes of society.

### **6.5 Listening for wisdom**

The importance of relationships and listening to others’ stories runs through the biblical narrative (Chapter Four) and the conceptual literature (Chapter Five).

It is shaped by the following emerging themes:

- Importance of the covenant relationship.
- Interplay of host and guest.
- Creating space for encounter and community where change can take place.

- 'Coming alongside' through in-depth encounter, understanding of and learning with others.
- The teacher (and pupil) as vulnerable.
- Listening to others through encounter and exchange of story.

Hospitality occurs in community or in a relationship. A host is always hosting someone. In addition, listening always takes place with others. However, in a Christian context being a host also means listening to those on the margins, and considering questions of meaning and purpose. The listening should lead to change and transformation - in terms of knowledge and understanding in particular - but also in terms of values and attitudes. This means listening to theological voices (e.g. sacred texts, scriptures, authoritative texts) as well as engaging with the diversity of members of religious and belief communities. Listening for wisdom implies intellectual hospitality, an openness to learn and not coming to the learning episode with the mind already closed. This means not making assumptions, but being open to new ideas and perspectives.

## **6.6 The concept of a lived pedagogy**

I am putting forward the idea that the three principles are underpinned by an ontological understanding of hospitality. This is an emerging theme through Chapters Four and Five. In particular, York (2002), Nouwen (1998), Westfield (2001) and Palmer (2007) emphasise this aspect of hospitality, as well as narratives within the biblical literature where Jesus is host-guest (for example, Luke 24:13-34). I am presenting an understanding of pedagogy as lived experience. The means pedagogy is not done to others, rather it is something which is embodied and expressed. This reflects the complex nature of the host-guest relationship and the notion that hospitality in Christian theology is more about being a host, rather than providing hospitality. This means the teacher embodies the principles of the pedagogy and lives them out.

## **6.7 Shaping the proposition**

Having established this preliminary proposition, I wanted to seek the views of teachers before refining and honing the principles further. Therefore, it was at this stage that I shared the three draft principles with a small focus

group. The focus group was set up primarily to analyse and evaluate the three principles. The aim was not so much to test out the ideas, but to share them and then clarify them in light of comments made by the teachers. In Chapter Seven I record how the focus group process enabled me to deepen my understanding and gain insight from teachers.

## **Chapter 7. Shaping the proposition: A Focus Group Study**

### **7.1 The purpose of my focus group**

The purpose of the focus group was to explore and engage with both current pedagogical approaches, as outlined in Chapter One, and my proposed set of pedagogical principles for RE in Church of England schools based on a theology of hospitality, as outlined in Chapter Six. The focus group was facilitated and moderated by myself as the researcher. It was important to take on this role myself because of the specific outcomes I wanted to achieve from the group. The skills required by the participants were those of analysis, evaluation and interpretation. The group was set up to help develop and critique the principles and ensure the creation of pedagogical principles could be applied in the classroom. The participants could be described as a sounding board for my principles. They allowed me to explore and refine my principles more fully as part of the hermeneutical process. Therefore, the focus group helped me identify emerging themes and draw conclusions which were then used to inform and clarify my own thinking.

### **7.2 Group participants**

The Diocese of Norwich gave permission for me to email all Church of England primary schools in the Diocese with an invitation to take part in the focus group (Appendix 2). Six teachers responded to this request, but one (the only male respondent) had to withdraw due to difficulties over the timing of sessions. The agreement of each participant's headteacher was sought before commencement of the focus group meetings.

Five Primary Phase teachers took part in four focus group meetings over a period of six months. Two teachers worked in federations of schools so had contact with a large number of teaching staff. One worked in a junior school so her experience was only with Key Stage Two. Four of the five teachers were RE subject leaders, the other teacher was a member of the senior leadership team in her school. Two of the teachers led spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum. All the teachers

were female and all worked in Church of England schools in the Primary Phase. The teachers are referred to in the following way in the thesis.

Teacher A: Subject leader in a Junior School

Teacher B: Subject leader across a Federation of Schools

Teacher C: Subject leader across a Federation of Schools

Teacher D: Subject leader in a primary school that had previously been a community school

Teacher E: Member of Senior Leadership team and responsible for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across her school

Table 1 sets out the attendance at focus group meetings by each participant.

Teacher	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
<b>A</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>B</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>C</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>D</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>E</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 1: Attendance at focus group meetings

### 7.3 Location and timings of my group

The group met three times at Diocesan House in Easton, Norwich and once in a participant school. A central location for the focus group was important, as the participants were arriving from very different locations within Norfolk. The space was easily accessible and no more than a 30-minute drive for any one participant. The setting in Diocesan House was light and warm, with a table for participants to sit around and be able to have eye contact with one another. Prior to the formal start of the focus group sessions, it was important that all participants were made to feel at ease and comfortable within the setting. For example, refreshments were provided and introductions made so that everyone knew each other's name. This was repeated at the beginning of the second session for the benefit of the



participant who could not attend the first session. This welcome led naturally into an overview of the purpose of the group, and a setting of ground rules. These rules included the importance of listening to one another, the value of each contribution being made and not speaking over one another so that all comments could be heard on the voice recording. Meetings lasted between 1.5-2 hours. The participants met four times between January and June 2015. Due to unforeseen circumstances such as illness, childcare difficulties, or work commitments, not all five participants were present at all the sessions. After the initial meeting which was held during school time, all other meetings were held after school as this suited the participants better. The interested male participant was re-invited to take part once it was established the meetings would take place after school, but he was still unable to attend.

#### **7.4 Ethics**

The teachers have been anonymised when writing up the focus group discussions. In the information sheet provided to participants it was made clear that they would be anonymised in the thesis and that the findings or themes would be used to develop my hypothesis. The participants were not co-researchers since they were not joint contributors or investigators, they were presented with a hypothesis. Neither were the participants involved with the interpretation of the focus group conclusions. However, they were more than simply participants in the research. I have therefore used the term 'co-dependent' to describe the relationship between myself and the focus group. I was dependent on the group as a sounding board for my principles. Yet the group were also dependent on me as the researcher to present the initial hypothesis and then to interpret the focus group sessions, drawing out themes and conclusions. In addition, this distinction was made verbally in the first meeting with the group. This enabled me to maintain ownership over the principles, whilst acknowledging the equal value of all contributions. The focus group discussions led to a variety of opinions from participants in relation to the principles, and this was regarded as an important aspect of the research. The analysis explores these differences of opinion and draws conclusions from them.

There was no formal incentive in terms of payment. However, being part of current research into pedagogy was in itself an incentive for some (Teachers A, B and D) as they felt it may have an impact on their practice. However, for one participant (Teacher E) this was not an incentive at all; she was just interested in thinking about different ideas. In many ways the focus group provided a form of professional development as it encouraged collaborative reflection. In addition, as the participants were all aware of my role as a Diocesan adviser, they may all have viewed the opportunity to take part as a form of professional development even if they did not articulate this to me. I made it clear throughout that the aim of the sessions was to gather their views, and that I wanted them to critique rather than concur with the hypothesis presented. The possibility of developing professionally through engagement with the focus group was made clear in the information sheet, but also that the primary aim of the focus group was to develop a hypothesis for my research. Focus group participants are listed in the Acknowledgements with their consent and copies of the participant letter and information are in Appendices Three and Four.

### **7.5 The design of my group**

In the focus group sessions, I used structured but open-ended questioning. This established a path between a more formal structured focus group and a less structured group as outlined by Morgan (1997). Whilst I guided the participants with particular activities and stimuli, I allowed the group to explore their ideas together in order that new findings emerged. This is similar to the 'funnel' approach which Morgan (1997, p.41) explains as a compromise between the more and less formal approaches. A less structured approach is used to begin with, and then the ideas are funnelled into more specific discussion questions. The first focus group session allowed for a wider exploration of ideas about RE, pedagogy and purpose, whereas the second and subsequent sessions focused on specific questions relating to my hypothesis. In addition, the design of the group was similar to that of a Community of Enquiry (Lipman, 2003). A stimulus was shared which raised questions, which in turn led to seeking after meaning and construction of new ideas. This Community of Enquiry approach is built on social constructivist theories of learning which capitalise on natural curiosity and connect with personal beliefs, attitudes

and interests (Scholl, Nichols and Burgh, 2015, p.3). Using this approach reinforced the notion that I was a facilitator rather than an 'expert', and that the participants whilst not co-researchers were active enquirers into the proposed hypothesis.

## **7.6 The structure of the focus group meetings based on the work of Kruegar (1994)**

### **Conceptualisation**

This phase was about establishing the purpose of the group and identifying clearly the research questions to be explored. This was done through the initial participant invitation, and follow-up communication with those who signed up for the group. In the first session, I made it clear that I wanted to learn from the participants, and that my hypothesis was not a consolidated theory.

### **Questioning**

Then et al. (2014) suggest different types of question should be employed in a focus group: engagement, exploration and exit questions. I used this as a structure for my focus group meetings. The engagement questions allowed the participants to get to know one another and acted as a way of encouraging openness and active participation. In this stage, the tone and atmosphere were created, so ensuring the participants were at ease and felt safe within the environment. Rules in relation to confidentiality were reiterated here to ensure that fears and apprehensions were aired and addressed. In my engagement stage participants were given the opportunity to articulate their narrative around religious education. This was an important part of the focus group as it exemplified one of the principles of pedagogy being tested (creation of space), and also allowed for the story of the teacher of RE to be told. It established their preconceptions and assumptions about the purpose and nature of religious education in church schools. This helped me to better analyse the results as I was aware of the teachers' own world views and understanding of religious education in a broad sense. As teacher D was absent in the first session, some of these aspects were repeated at the beginning of the second session.

In the exploration phase questions were asked of the focus group participants. The most important skill required of me was to listen. Listening to responses carefully and interpreting them accurately were important because the aim of the group was to provide me with ideas and perspectives to support or challenge my hypothesis. Because I am an expert in my field, there was a danger that the focus group might become a question-and-answer session rather than a discussion. I consciously allowed the group to talk about the questions, rather than interjecting with my own view. It was important to ensure that the group participants regarded themselves as the experts, rather than myself. Questions were formed so they were not about taste, i.e. not asking 'Do you like this analogy?', but rather 'What do you think of this analogy?'. The questions were prepared in a logical sequence, but within this there was flexibility so that this phase ran smoothly and without interruption. Each question was directed at the group, not at individuals. This ensured that the participants felt they were contributing to a whole and were not being asked for individual responses which may have put some of them under pressure. New knowledge was therefore constructed among the participants as they responded to the questions. Meanings emerged which were sometimes complex, as participants used different words or phrases to mean the same thing and I had to question further to clarify. It was important that participants referred to their own experiences, as this allowed for a more dynamic interaction and discussion, and enabled me to see potential application to the classroom. Linking their opinions back to their own classroom practice or wider educational context as a teacher was important in establishing an atmosphere where views could be challenged and changed. Morgan (1997) argues that participants are more willing to compare an experience to their own, but less willing to challenge a viewpoint. This was evident when participants talked about the use of the word 'Christ' in one of the principles. Talking about experiences of the classroom was therefore a crucial part of the focus group process and is reflected in the hypothesis. Table 2 shows the questions and themes explored in each session.

Session	Questions and themes explored
1	<p>The Purpose of RE in a general sense - is there a shared purpose?</p> <p>The Purpose of RE in Church of England schools in particular and how this related to their own understanding. This included analysing statements from both the <i>National Society Statement of Entitlement</i> (2011) and <i>Going for Growth</i> (2001).</p> <p>Current pedagogical approaches used in RE arising from the literature review and how these were used/not used in the teachers' contexts.</p> <p>Views on the most appropriate pedagogical approaches in a Church of England school context.</p>
2	<p>The three draft principles were shared with the focus group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating space</li> <li>• Encountering Christ, through encountering others</li> <li>• Listening for wisdom.</li> </ul> <p>Initial reactions were sought about what they might mean, how they might interpret them and what they might mean in the classroom.</p> <p>Creating space as a principle was explored in depth. Participants were introduced to the idea of 'space' and asked to consider what this might mean. They were then asked for their views on the terms 'safe', 'values', 'slow' and 'deep' in relation to creating space.</p> <p>The second principle 'Encountering Christ through encountering others' was explored in terms of an encounter being humble, deep and authentic.</p>
3	<p>The last principle 'listening for wisdom' was explored particularly in relation to story, theological enquiry and relationships.</p> <p>The other two principles were revisited briefly to pick up on issues raised in the previous session.</p> <p>The analogy of embrace was introduced for discussion, including the idea that the thesis title could be 'A Pedagogy of Embrace'.</p>
4	<p>Issues raised in the previous sessions were revisited including questions about inclusion, femininity, the academic nature of the subject, the use of the term 'Christ' in the second principle and the value of having principles which underpin pedagogy.</p> <p>The group shared images and pictures of 'embrace' that they felt might be helpful.</p> <p>The group explored through a process of active contemplation images provided by me relating to embrace and hospitality to deepen their interpretations of the two analogies, and to consider if one may be more helpful than the other.</p>

Table 2: Questions and themes explored in each focus group session

Exit questions allowed me to ensure the key points had been recorded and that nothing had been misunderstood. Participants learned through their engagement with the questions presented, as well as through the sharing of ideas with one another. At the end of the sessions informal opportunities were provided for the teachers to re-evaluate what they were doing in RE and in particular reconsider the purpose of the subject. Two of the participants wrote about how the sessions had impacted on their own professional development.

### **7.7 Reporting and analysing my group discussions**

Prior to the first focus group session, all participants were informed of the methods of recording. The use of an iPad voice-recorder was made, so that all parts of the conversation were captured. At the beginning of each session each participant was asked to speak into the microphone to ensure they could be heard. I then transcribed each meeting in full in order to inform the next session. Initial analysis took place after each group session, so that questioning could be based on issues that had arisen in previous meetings. In addition, photographs of workshop-style activities were taken in some sessions to capture particular views or ideas. This enabled me to record easily how teachers set out different ideas, e.g. in a 'sorting' activity, or when they drew a diagram to explain something to the group.

Having recorded the focus group, a transcript was made and analysis undertaken. In particular the following questions were used:

- Were there any patterns emerging? Within each principle and/or across principles?
- Was there a common consensus in terms of a. purpose? b. an understanding of each principle? c. the analogies being used?
- What new questions have arisen? Are these important in terms of my two research questions?
- What conclusions can I draw? How will they inform my final principles?

The analysis focused specifically on answers to the research questions and whether the principles of pedagogy were coherent and understandable for teachers. I read the transcripts and then recorded my analysis within the text in a different colour. This was often in the form of questions to ask

myself as the primary aim was for the focus group to help me refine my principles. I highlighted key passages within the text and added handwritten notes to identify themes. I was aware that my hypothesis was challenged, particularly in terms of the use of the phrase 'Encountering Christ'. In addition, some of the initial findings led to questions which I had not anticipated, specifically around the femininity of the approach. Analysis involved the identifying and coding of key phrases and terms in the transcript. I have included an example of an analysed piece of transcript in Appendix 8. In particular I was looking for themes that either supported, developed or questioned my hypothesis. I have used the language from the participants in the formulation of the final principles to ensure the authenticity of the research (Then et al., 2014).

Throughout the different focus group sessions, participants were evaluating alternatives and demonstrating to me how they understood the pedagogical principles in the hypothesis. I showed participants options or ideas, and they were asked to choose, interact or engage with these and develop their thinking as a group together.

### **7.8 Interpretation and Analysis of the focus group discussions**

In this section I undertake an interpretation and analysis of the focus group discussions. I have grouped them under the following headings as this was the most helpful way to apply them to my preliminary proposition:

- The purpose and place of RE.
- Creating space.
- Encountering Christ, though encountering others.
- Listening for wisdom.
- Themes relating to all three principles.

### 7.8.1 The Purpose of RE

#### **Theme 1: The purpose of religious education in Church of England schools as understood by these participants lacked clarity**

Participant responses showed that there was uncertainty about the purpose of religious education in Church of England schools. There were some aspects of agreement, but this was overshadowed by the lack of clarity and coherence in responses. Agreement was shown around the importance of religious education in terms of being about more than knowledge. The use of the term '*children*' rather than '*pupils*' by all respondents when discussing the purpose of the subject indicated that they were thinking more broadly than just the academic, and had a more holistic view of the child in mind. Participants indicated that some form of changing behaviour would occur as a result of studying RE. This was couched in terms of '*opening eyes*' (A), '*asking questions*' (B), '*making own decisions*' (C) and '*accepting the views and beliefs of others*' (D). Underlying the participants' responses was a sense that RE should contribute to social cohesion and pupil well-being.

*'...if they [the pupils] were in a big city they would probably come across different religions in their school base, but in my school base it's mainly Christians, they don't get to meet or talk to people from different religions. So I think it is really important for us to open their eyes, and provide access to other religions as well as Christianity'*  
(Teacher C)

There was agreement, too, that RE was more than teaching Christianity, because the subject was about understanding others and being able to get along and live with them in society. There was some agreement that RE was about asking questions. All the teachers cited questions as the best way into teaching the subject at the start of an enquiry or unit of work.

Participants themselves were not sure if they shared the same purpose for religious education. Long pauses in the discussion when asked about shared purpose indicated that they were uncertain. Whilst they all shared a desire for similar outcomes in terms of children who could navigate the world of religion and belief, their understanding of the purpose was not



shared. The participants themselves showed that their own individual understanding of purpose was also internally inconsistent. For example, Teacher E said in early discussions that the purpose of RE was:

*'to ensure children know the similarities and difference between religions, and to accept the views and beliefs of others'*

However, later in the same discussion she showed lack of consistency in her responses:

*'it is about developing children what will be very responsible individuals, who will play an important role in society'*

*'it is about giving them knowledge, understanding, information... and then that child using that information...'*

*'we are very much about developing the whole child...'*

In some instances she gave primacy to knowledge and in others the shaping of the child. Although not mutually exclusive her emphasis changed her understanding of the purpose RE and this seemed to change depending on the lesson being taught.

When asked early in the discussions to choose an approach to teaching (Appendix Five) Teacher B identified one which talked about a quest for truth (Card Number 4). However, when reviewing this later she said she had not focused on the word truth despite the word being used twice in a very short paragraph. This suggested that the teacher picked out the bits of the pedagogical definitions that she agreed with and ignored other words and phrases.

It is possible that my phrasing of some of the pedagogies and the principles that lie behind them contributed to the confusion. I summarised the pedagogies from my literature review (Chapter One), but may not have done this in the most teacher-friendly language possible. However, it was clear that these teachers read what they wanted to read, and did not always take on board fully what a particular approach was saying. It was

also evident that the pedagogical approaches themselves caused confusion for this group of teachers, by compartmentalising different approaches to RE. They questioned the difference between constructing meaning and a quest for truth, for example, and whether the human development approach was more about collective worship than RE. This supported my analysis of pedagogical approaches in Chapter One, where I established that the purpose of RE was linked to particular pedagogical approaches, yet is often not understood in this way in the classroom. This group of teachers focused more on strategies than the principles which lay behind the approaches.

It was also clear that these teachers agreed on what RE was not. They all maintained that it was not about a phenomenological approach, an experiential approach or a faith nurture approach. This meant they had created some boundaries around the purpose of the subject.

## **Theme 2: The purpose of religious education reflects the teacher's own worldview and broader understanding of the purpose of education**

This was particularly noticeable in the responses made by the teacher who was not an RE subject leader (Teacher E). Her views seemed to be couched in terms of education more broadly with a focus on the importance of developing the whole child. In addition, Teacher B spoke frequently about creating happy, safe environments for the children and having positive working relationships with the children. Thus, these teachers' views of RE and how they might understand this were set within their broader views of education, particularly as nurture. The emotional nature of some responses from participants reflected their own views about education more generally. Emotive phrases such as RE being a '*powerful tool*', or talking about teaching moments in terms of '*I love...*' or '*wow*' or '*lovely*' showed that RE was more than purely imparting knowledge, but involved deep emotions.

The worldviews of the teachers and their own beliefs seemed to have an impact on the view of RE they adopted. This then had an impact on how they taught the subject.

*'I think people's personal values, feelings and beliefs, I think that might have a knock-on effect as to how these [the pedagogical approaches] might be viewed...'* (Teacher B)

This was supported by Teacher C who maintained that teachers in her school were more likely to view the purpose of RE in terms of faith nurture; thus, passing on the truths and rituals of the Anglican tradition to the next generation. This suggested the teacher's own understanding of religion and belief related to how they understand RE. Teacher C felt that some in her school equated RE with only Christianity.

*'They [teachers in my school] see RE as Christianity, because we are a Church school, the children need to know about Christianity and Christianity is what teachers feel more confident delivering.'*

### **Theme 3: The purpose of religious education and choice of pedagogy reflected the teacher's context**

When participants were given choices of pedagogical approaches they might use (Appendix 5) and asked to identify the one they most regularly used, their choices did not necessarily match the purpose of religious education identified in the previous discussions. In most cases this was due to the influence of their own school context. Thus, they modified their purpose of the subject and their chosen pedagogy depending on who and what they were teaching.

*'I chose number 7 [Interpretive] because it sees religion as a lived experience rather than a remote concept...because we have a lot of different religions represented in school anyway...'* (Teacher A)

*'I chose number 6 [Gift to the Child] especially with little ones...'*  
(Teacher C)

*'It depends on your lesson...because in different types of lesson I might start with an object... it would depend what I was focusing on...'* (Teacher E)

*'Would our responses be different if we were secondary teachers?'*  
(Teacher E)

The theoretical view of the purpose of RE and the pedagogy the teacher used was largely dependent on the context the teacher was working in. The participants referred to religious diversity within the classroom, the ages of the children and the focus of a particular lesson. All of these seemed to have an impact on both the purpose of RE and the pedagogy used. Although Teacher A had a more coherent view of the purpose of RE relating to religion as lived experience compared to the other participants, this seemed to be driven by her work in a school where diversity of belief was common-place. So therefore, her purpose for the subject made sense in her particular context.

In addition, the global context also seemed to have a bearing on how the purpose of RE is viewed.

*'I think in the world we live in at the moment, that this [tolerance and respect] is very important'* (Teacher E)

This changing global context could potentially have an impact on all teachers, whatever school they were working in. For example, the importance of tolerance and respect, particularly post-Brexit<sup>12</sup>, may have an influence on the way subjects like are RE are perceived.

**Theme 4: The understanding of the relationship between the Christian ethos in a Church of England Primary school (and its mission) and religious education as understood by the participants was confused**

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<sup>12</sup> Brexit is a popular term (at the time of writing) for the United Kingdom's intended withdrawal from the European Union in March 2019.

When asked specifically about the purpose of RE in Church of England schools two of the teachers immediately started referring to collective worship, nativity plays and prayer spaces. Teacher E seemed unable in her responses to detach RE from the Christian ethos of the school. This was also reflected in responses from Teachers C and E who said teachers in their schools thought RE was about teaching Christianity. Thus, the status of Christianity within a Church school seemed to have an impact on how the subject was both viewed and how it was taught.

When presented with the mission statement from *Going for Growth* (Church of England, 2010) and the aims from *Statement of Entitlement for Religious Education* (Church of England, 2011) (Appendix 6), the teachers found it hard to unite the two. They found it even harder to affiliate their own purpose (however confused) with the mission and aims identified in these two documents. The tone of the teachers' voices in this part of the conversation showed consternation and in one case anger.

*'I wondered what is meant by every child having a life-enhancing encounter, what do we mean by a life-enhancing encounter? For a child from a Christian home, I can understand what that means, but for a child from another faith what is a life-enhancing encounter...I can tolerate these crazy people... is that a life-enhancing encounter... is that what it means?'* (Teacher A)

One of the key areas of concern was over the words 'every child' (Church of England, 2010, p.11). Two of the teachers then suggested that if this was to be part of RE, then it must be about spiritual development.

*'If you are developing spiritually that is your own experience of Christianity'* (Teacher B)

Thus, although the teachers had earlier completely discounted the idea that RE's primary purpose was about spiritual development, in order to make sense of the statements from the Church of England they now suggested it was.

Towards the end of the first session there was increased confusion about how the Christian ethos of the school and RE could be in relationship with one another. Teacher E reduced religious education to teaching about Christian values, whereas Teacher C suggested that using the enquiry process (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012, p.21) would provide one way of engaging better with the experience of the Christian believer. On the other hand, Teacher A suggested that focusing on knowledge and stories (narratives) may provide a way forward to sit RE within the wider Christian ethos of the school.

However, Teacher A provided an interesting way forward, and this reflected my preliminary proposition although at this stage it had not been discussed by the focus group,

*'I was seeing [earlier] each individual religion being a living religion, getting people in, seeing it as living.... I think this links well with these two statements [the mission and aims]... because every time you invite someone into your school you are welcoming them into your Christian environment, inviting them into your home....you're giving them tea...whatever... water... so I think it fits perfectly to invite someone in...' (Teacher A).*

This focus on the interpretive approach and encounters with members of faith and belief uses hospitality language even though this had not been raised yet in the focus group sessions.

### **7.8.2 Creating Space**

#### **Theme 5: Creating space was conceived as more than physical space**

The teachers understood the creation of space in broad terms; their responses focused beyond the physical idea of space.

*'a space in our heads, an internal or external space' (Teacher E)*

*'an opportunity just to be, to be still.... an opportunity to just be thinking and being' (Teacher D)*

There was a sense that the creation of space was about being in a certain state, or having a certain state of mind and heart. This seemed to apply to both the teacher and the pupils in the 'space'. Teachers felt the space created should allow for exploration and experience, where pupils could think and reflect. In order for this to happen they felt that the place should be emotionally safe, where pupils felt able to ask questions and take risks. The connection between emotion and intellect was also stressed in a different way in terms of the importance of having an emotional and/or intellectual connection with the subject. Teachers felt the space created should allow opportunities for both emotional **and** intellectual engagement. Teacher B talked about being '*ready for learning*' and Teacher E talked about the importance of understanding the pupils' '*state of mind*'. However, both of these teachers went further to suggest that there could be '*joy*' in learning, '*wow*' moments and a '*love*' for the subject. Teacher B implied that emotional engagement with a topic could also lead to a better academic outcome because of heightened engagement with the learning process.

For two of the teachers, creating this space involved the use of a focal object (e.g. a candle, pink fluffy blanket) in order to set apart RE from what had gone on before in the school day. This indicated that the teachers saw RE in a different way to some of the other subjects they taught.

*'So in a way whether we use a blanket or a candle, or whatever in the centre, it is creating a focus for getting rid of the other things going on out there' (Teacher A)*

The participants indicated that for a space to be effective then both choice and boundaries were required. The focal point seemed to provide a 'mark' or psychological boundary to the space. In addition, the teachers gave examples of pupils being given a choice of tasks or groupings. Teacher E talked about how she allowed physical space for the children to work, so she was not hovering over them. So space and choices within boundaries were both important.

Some of the teacher responses indicated a strong sense of nurture. These examples were often related to quiet moments, silence or stillness. Some

discussion took place as to whether the space to be created was 'feminine' in nature, particularly in relation to the term nurturing. However, the teachers were in agreement that it was more about the skill of becoming focused on learning, rather than a sense of mothering. The teachers stressed that rather than feminine, the skills to be developed were not related to gender, but were about '*stillness*', '*thoughtfulness*' (Teacher D) and '*being focused*' (Teacher E).

The significant number of references to emotions, nurture and personal development in the focus group sessions led me to analyse the work of some theologians who came from feminist and womanist perspectives to see if they provided further insights into hospitality. This is an example of the hermeneutical spiral at work. As this theme arose, I undertook further conceptual literature reviews whilst still engaging with the focus group meetings to decide whether it was a significant idea to be taken forward.

### **7.8.3 Encountering Christ, through encountering others**

#### **Theme 6: The use of the word 'Christ' caused confusion about the purpose of RE**

This theme was the most difficult one to grapple with in the analysis as the implications of including or not including this term were very significant. Although a small focus group, the varying views from the participants, including contradictory comments from individuals, showed there was confusion about using the term 'Christ' in the principles. Four of the five participants felt that the term should be used. They cited the following reasons for including the word 'Christ':

*'I think that even if you are not starting from a Christianity point of view, the children can still encounter Christ though whatever unit you do' (Teacher A)*

*'It focuses you, if you take out 'Christ' what are you asking?'*  
(Teacher B)

*'Encountering Christ is what a church school is all about...'*  
(Teacher B)



*'Reflecting on how they act...how they can be more Christlike... if you take Christ out then your focus has gone... I'm encountering others, but what am I learning from others...but doing RE in a church school gives a focus' (Teacher C)*

*'I think sometimes some things you do, you are not explicitly saying Christ, but feeding in all the time' (Teacher D)*

*'I would say it is inclusive for all teachers in a church school, I would keep the 'Christ bit' (Teacher D)*

These teachers argued that including the word Christ emphasised the distinctiveness of RE in a Church school. However, the danger, as seen in the language the teachers used, was that Christianity could be regarded as superior to other religions and beliefs by teachers in general and/or pupils if this terminology was used. Although the place of Christianity should be central, as indicated in the revised *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016), the language used by the teachers here implied exclusivity. This suggests that Smith's (2009) notion that Christianity (particularly Western Christianity) is regarded as superior in some way has merit, and that a refocus on humility and love is needed if one is to educate from a Christian perspective.

This idea of superiority was not the intention of the draft principle. The use of the term '*Christlike*' suggested that this participant (Teacher C) saw RE in terms of spiritual, possibly faith formation, which conflicted with the primary purpose of the subject outlined in this thesis and expounded in the revised *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016). The use of the term 'Christ' seemed to suggest there was a danger of RE becoming faith nurture, or being misunderstood as this. Even if it did not become faith nurture, there was an implication that all religions and beliefs would be seen through a Christian lens. This could lead to a form of reductionism, whereby non-Christian beliefs are viewed only from within the Christian tradition. This would mean authenticity is less likely to be achieved, meaning pupils might only gain a Christian perspective of non-Christian beliefs.

Teacher A gave the example of Muslim children encountering Christ through a visit to Walsingham, a centre of Christian pilgrimage in Norfolk. She felt that this was because they could identify with the concept of spiritual journey. However, Teacher A, in previous responses showed that she was able to distinguish clearly between RE, collective worship and spiritual development. This meant that she did not see RE as any form of faith nurture. Therefore, although this is a good example to support the inclusion of the word 'Christ', this is largely due to her understanding of the subject and her ability to distinguish RE from values, worship and spirituality. One would not be able to guarantee that other teachers would view the example in the same way. Teacher B in particular did not make this distinction so clearly and in other responses tended towards an understanding of RE in terms of spirituality. Therefore, it would be more likely for her to interpret the words 'Encountering Christ' as faith nurture. Since one of the key premises of the thesis is to clarify the purpose of RE, it seems counter-productive to include the term 'Christ'.

Teacher E felt strongly that the term should not be used because:

*'It narrows it down to Christianity, rather than looking at RE overall'*  
(Teacher E)

*'I don't know if you need to have it [the term Christ]... it could just be encountering others, because there will always be those links back in a Church School to Christianity...'* (Teacher E)

In these responses, the participant suggested that just by being a Church school the notion of 'encountering Christ' was implied through everything the school does, so therefore one does not need to make it explicit in the pedagogical principles. She felt it was unnecessary to include it. In addition, she uses the term 'narrow' suggesting that she felt it limited what one would explore in RE. This narrowness is juxtaposed with the heart of the proposed principles and the theology of hospitality. In addition, Teacher E felt that the other two principles were inclusive and therefore to her it seemed strange that this principle was focused so specifically on Christianity. She said,

*'For me number one (creating space) and number three (listening for wisdom) can apply to any religion, number two could apply to any religion in relation to Christianity, but it does have Christianity very much as the focus' (Teacher E)*

In the final focus group session this question was revisited. In this session Teachers A, B and D all agreed that the term 'Christ' should remain, as the pedagogical principles were designed for Church of England schools. Teacher E was not present at this session. Teacher D had reflected on her own context further and felt that all the teachers in her school would be able to accept the term 'Christ' in the principles. Teacher B said she didn't anticipate any barriers. However, the fact that potentially there may be barriers was another reason to question the term's inclusivity. For example, Teacher A said,

*'...some may query that being in... and other words not being in...but in my particular environment that is not a problem...'*  
(Teacher A)

In addition, there were some questions about what a teacher would be doing in RE if children were to encounter Christ through all aspects of RE. Teacher D said,

*'... and are we encountering Christ in academic RE...? If you are looking at other religions, other than Christianity, the encountering others.... it's not necessarily leading back to encountering Christ is it? I'm not sure it is an act of encountering Christ...'* (Teacher D)

This participant suggested that encountering Christ in RE could be seen as less academic and may be difficult to achieve if religions and beliefs other than Christianity are being explored.

Despite the teachers' insistence that the word 'Christ' was acceptable, within the title of the second principle (Encountering Christ, through encountering others) it remained problematic. The fact that it raised questions and uncertainty was in itself a reason for not including the term,

particularly as it was open to wide interpretation. One of the aims of this thesis was to clarify the relationship between RE and the Christian mission of the school, and therefore show how the subject can contribute to this mission without being confessional in nature or lead to faith formation. If the Christian ethos is assumed in a Church of England school, then as Teacher E indicated there is no need to use the word Christ.

### **Theme 7: These teachers felt the encounter should enable the children to understand religion ‘from within’**

Participant responses indicated that using ‘story’ would form a central part of RE using the three proposed principles. Listening was also felt to be central in terms of listening to each other as well as to visitors who would share their stories. Teacher D stressed the importance of reading primary sources with the children, such as the bible. She talked about how this was important to check for accuracy in the accounts we hear. For example, when listening to accounts of the nativity story it was important to know if they accurately reflected the biblical text.

When participants were introduced to the idea of a ‘humble encounter’ they immediately made connections with the idea of servanthood. This led them to consider an approach to RE which would involve seeing things from another point of view and showing empathy. They linked this with practical strategies such as role-play or hot-seating.

*‘If you actually become someone else or experience being someone else it is a very powerful force’ (Teacher E)*

In addition, as well as empathising with people who hold different belief positions, teachers felt it was important to engage with ‘*real life*’ believers to provide an authentic experience for pupils. Teacher C talked about being able to ‘*see through the eyes*’ of a Jewish believer and ‘*experiencing*’ Shabbat with her. Teacher B had invited in a different Jewish visitor, but had come to the same conclusions. She said,

*‘They can share what’s really important to them, we can share, but it’s not the same as having the person there to share their own*

*stories and children can ask them questions as well. To actually hear the person speaking Hebrew, I can't facilitate that'. (Teacher B)*

The participant here speaks about understanding genuine faith, and how talking about someone else's faith is not the same as someone talking about it themselves. Allowing people to tell their story enables it to be real.

Three of the participants took this notion a step further and talked about 'immersing' oneself in beliefs and practices of a particular faith or belief tradition. For example,

*'In making things real for the children, we have 'Living Nativity' so it's a different experience of listening for wisdom, it's about being immersed in something, and I think that's important as if you can't get to the real thing and have a real person in, then that is the next best...' (Teacher E)*

Teachers saw dangers in text and information books which they felt did not represent the reality of lived religion. They also felt that books presented religion as something in the past, not something in the present.

Nevertheless, the challenges of actually enabling real-life encounters to happen were also highlighted. All participants said that they found it hard to find members of faith and belief systems who would visit schools. Thus, enabling children to see religion and belief 'from within' was potentially limited.

#### **Theme 8: These teachers felt the encounter should be real, reflecting the breadth of religious expression**

Linked closely to the above theme, the participants emphasised the importance of pupils understanding the diversity of belief and seeing religions as 'living things'. Teacher A reflected on her own experience of teaching about a topic in RE with another teacher in the room. Both teachers shared the same faith, but had very different viewpoints about the topic under discussion. She talked about the value of conversation between them about the diversity within a faith tradition. This was supported by

Teacher E who said that talking about her own faith with others enabled her to realise that within a particular faith, one is influenced by one's own values and family, and that even within one belief tradition there are many interpretations and expressions of faith. There was agreement that resources being used in RE did not always acknowledge this diversity of religion, particularly different cultural expressions.

*'In a book it says Christians do this and I think, no I don't'.*

(Teacher A)

As a result of one of the focus group sessions, Teacher A took some of her Muslim pupils to visit pupils at Teacher B's school. The aim of this was to enable children to engage with the reality of lived religion and the diversity of expression.

#### **7.8.4 Listening for Wisdom**

##### **Theme 9: Listening for wisdom was conceived as more than gaining knowledge**

The participants couched the principle of listening for wisdom primarily in terms of application; that is, application of knowledge and/or application of truths to the pupils' own lives. Teacher A specifically said that religious education was more than presenting a list of facts. Listening was seen as something internal as well as external; for example, listening to one's own feelings or reflecting on one's own experiences. This was particularly evident in responses from Teachers B and E who tended to stress the personal development aspects of RE.

*'I was initially thinking stories that we read but I also think it is about listening to yourself, listening to what is important to you, so listening to what is important to others, then reflecting on what is important to you...your own values'* (Teacher E)

*'I think it is about how to be wise in a situation...'* (Teacher B)

Teachers talked about application of knowledge to everyday situations through a process of internalisation. Teacher B talked about responding with wisdom, or being wise. So there was a sense of change taking place in the pupil as a result of the knowledge they have gained. There were a number of references in participant responses to '*thinking deeply*' or undertaking '*in-depth questioning*'. The participant responses indicated that RE should contribute to pupils becoming more independent in their thinking and not just gaining knowledge.

#### **Theme 10: Listening for wisdom is usually done collectively**

Participants regularly referred to listening to one another or working collaboratively together in the enquiry process. The importance of discussion was stressed whether in terms of 'talking partners', small groups or whole class groupings. One participant summed this up by saying:

*'...the opportunity to listen to each other, and to go from having one viewpoint to sharing lots of ideas, and talking it through, really listening to each other, and possibly changing their mind or sharing things, but come to something together, some wisdom together, something individually they wouldn't have come across, but it's the listening to each other in my experience that purposeful whole class discussion takes place, where they are paying attention to each other'* (Teacher D)

All participants valued the process of enquiry in RE. They all used the process set out in the *Norfolk Agreed Syllabus* (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012). They felt that this supported collaborative working and allowed for conversations to take place about a topic. The focus on asking questions supported the notion of collaboration, as there was a sense of finding out together.

#### **Theme 11: Listening for wisdom takes time**

Participants agreed that the process of listening for wisdom takes time. There was a sense in their responses that learning needed to be slowed down in order for it to be effective.

*'They [the pupils] found the concept of them forgiving and someone's forgiving them quite difficult, so we were able, because we had the time today, to be able to explore and begin to understand it a bit more, sometimes we do not give them enough time in an RE lesson...'* (Teacher B)

Teacher A described a powerful moment when limited time led to limited 'listening for wisdom'.

*'We were choosing and looking at key verses in the bible. Children had to find out how a verse might be useful for a Christian. The verse was basically saying be true to who you are, but this boy said "I don't know who I am, I have just discovered the name I've been using isn't my real name", and that opened up a whole other entire scenario, but within the confines of an hour there wasn't the opportunity to explore that... the time constraints....'* (Teacher A)

Listening for wisdom, teachers felt, took time because wisdom itself was about living with the knowledge of what you have learned and then applying it to one's own experience.

*'I think if you are listening for wisdom, the teaching can happen in the RE lesson, but it's all the other things you do within the school life that embeds it'* (Teacher B)

Unsurprisingly, there was also a sense in responses that references to becoming wise would take place over much longer period of time than just a lesson or a half-termly unit of work. For example,

*'I also think you've got the journey for the children from reception onwards where they can revisit each religion again and again, and they come at it from different angles each time.... they come from a much more mature approach because they are growing up....'* (Teacher E)



### **7.8.5 Themes relating to all three principles**

Through the focus group analysis, I found there were themes which applied to all three preliminary principles. Here I outline these themes and how they relate to creating space, encountering Christ through encountering others and listening for wisdom.

#### **Theme 12: The effective implementation of the principles is dependent on the context of the teacher and how they interpret them**

This links with Theme Three cited above. Not only is an understanding of the purpose of RE dependent on the teacher's context and interpretation, but so is the implementation of any new principles which I might promote as a result of my final proposition.

For example, how a teacher understands the term 'Encountering Christ' would have an impact on how they implemented this principle. The interpretation of this may depend on the teacher's own beliefs and how they understand these in relation to the ethos of the Church school. Teacher E gave the example of her own interview to become a teacher in her current school. She talked about the expectations of working in a Church school and feeling comfortable in promoting the Christian values of the school. Others in the focus group felt they were not asked to promote the Christian ethos, but were expected to be sympathetic. This understanding of being in a Church school could potentially impact on the interpretation of the principles.

Alongside this, the teacher's own personal views about the subject and whether they were an '*open person*' was raised by Teacher B. She felt that unless the teacher showed openness, the child would not feel safe, and would not feel comfortable to share their own thoughts and feelings.

The participants also saw context as important in terms of implementation because of the way the timetable was constructed in different schools. For example, some participants taught RE across the school, whereas others just taught their class. Teachers felt there were advantages and disadvantages to both types of approach. However, their responses

showed that 'creating space' may be more difficult if a teacher only had a class for one hour a week as they couldn't follow through the learning beyond the RE lesson.

*'I guess as we are primary teachers, in some ways the space never ends. You can have a conversation or a lesson... you can refer to that again and again in other lessons, other times, the following weeks, so I think sometimes it can just continue and weave into everything'* (Teacher E)

Teachers felt that having principles was important, so that one understands what lies behind the teaching of RE (or any other subject). Teacher B suggested that having principles or a theoretical framework was essential, otherwise one did not know how to construct the learning. However, when asked on what principles they currently based their teaching of RE, none of the teachers could provide any suggestions, except for the importance of respect for others. They felt therefore that the proposed principles would provide a useful way forward for talking about appropriate pedagogy in the subject.

### **Theme 13: The importance of the ontological nature of being the teacher in terms of host-guest**

Participant responses indicated that they understood the principles in terms of their own being as a teacher, rather than what they did in practice. For example, they talked about being trusted and being observant. In particular in relation to the notion of humility, Teacher D felt this was about being humble as a teacher; saying to children that you do not know it all. She articulated confidently the idea that the teacher was also a learner, and that honesty with colleagues and with children about not knowing everything was important. Teacher E felt this was a learning point for her and her context.

*'You can't know everything, I can never teach the same thing twice because the second time I come to it I've learnt something new, thought about something I've never come across before, or the children think about something I have never come across'*

(Teacher D)

This suggests, in relation to a theology of hospitality, an interplay between the teacher as host and the teacher as guest. There was a sense from teacher responses that this applied not just to RE but also to other curriculum areas. Teacher B used examples of English and Maths to support her argument that pupils can effectively become the teachers, or hosts. This was primarily because she had not used this approach for RE. The idea of teacher and/or pupils as host may not therefore be unique to RE. However, I am using the analogy of host-guest in a particular way to describe a lived pedagogy which relates specifically to RE and the teachers' responses supported this assertion.

#### **Theme 14: The principles could be applied to subjects other than religious education**

It follows, therefore, that the participants felt the pedagogical principles could be applied to many if not all subjects. In particular in relation to the creation of space they felt the Christian ethos of the school should enable the creation of space to be evident in all subjects not just RE.

*'If you have that (space) as the ethos of your school and they (the pupils) feel safe, and they can trust you... then that sort of thing is going on' (Teacher E)*

Teacher B described an activity she used all through the school day to encourage the creation of space in the terms outlined in my thesis.

*'We also have a stone thing, a 'let it go' if anyone has worries or concerns they can take a glass pebble and they hold it in their hand and the worry or concern goes into the pebble, and then they put in on the side. If it is a big worry they know they have to speak to someone, but it works, all these pebbles clink clink ...even I use it sometimes...they really like 'let it go' as it reminds them of Frozen [the film]. (Teacher B).*

The final principles therefore need to indicate clearly how a theology of hospitality can specifically be applied to principles of pedagogy in RE. They will need to be distinct and detailed to ensure that, although not unique in application to RE, they have a particular function within the subject of RE itself that is unique.

## **7.9 The analogy of embrace and visual representations of hospitality**

As explained in Chapter Three, I have used an image-based method to stimulate create thinking and my understanding of the complex issues at stake as part of the hermeneutical process. As a result of this, the analogy of an embrace and visual representations of hospitality have helped me understand the relationship between the Christian ethos/mission of a school and RE, as well as to understand the nature of my pedagogical principles for RE in Church of England schools. In this section I draw conclusions from discussions with focus group members about the analogy of embrace and visual representations of hospitality. I record my observations, analysis and interpretation of how the teachers interacted with these two ideas and whether they viewed them as useful in terms of explaining the final pedagogical principles. I then deduce whether one or both may be helpful in my final outworking of the principles.

### **7.9.1 The analogy of embrace**

Teachers were invited to consider the analogy of embrace as a visual image for the pedagogical principles. The aim of this was to establish whether the notion of 'embrace' was a helpful one and to clarify how the analogy might be used if it was felt to be appropriate. Having introduced this idea teachers were asked to consider its value and appropriateness, and to critique it as a concept and possible title for the thesis.

An abstract notion of embrace was generally agreed by the teachers to be a positive way of expressing the pedagogical principles put forward.

*'I was trying to think along the lines of Henry Moore, because I wanted an abstract kind of image' (Teacher B)*

*'I was thinking head, holding...a big sculpture that you could actually climb on it, or go under it, or through it... I like that idea... rather than two people just physically... not a round shaped head...just a blob.... if you made it without form as such, then you interpret it...'*

(Teacher B)

Teachers spoke of an embrace as creating space, feeling safe and implying emotional connection. An embrace was also seen as something open and inclusive, and something which people could relate to in many different ways.

*'I've seen something very Matisse-like, something very abstract that, immediately the embrace itself makes you ask questions, thinking like a Henry Moore sculpture something that you can climb under, climb on, climb through, and you can be in the role of being embraced and or be doing the embracing depending on where you stand... it can be very tight and intimate, but it can also be that feeling of just understanding and acknowledging and I think that RE can be like that for different people at different times... '* (Teacher E)

*'It [an embrace] implies an emotional connection doesn't it'*

(Teacher A)

The idea of closeness in the embrace however was problematic. Teachers used words such as *'invasive'* or *'close proximity'*, in a negative sense suggesting that it might be too intimate. It was for this reason that the teachers were hesitant about the use of the title 'A Pedagogy of Embrace' for this thesis, and consequently as a name for the principles arising from the thesis. In their own contexts, they thought the analogy was potentially controversial because some might misunderstand it, see it as too emotional or not see RE as academically challenging enough (Teacher E used the word *'meaty'*). However, the three teachers present in this session all felt that in an ideal world the analogy should work as long as it was explained and that the visual representation was abstract rather than two people embracing.

The discussions about embrace also indicated that teachers were using the analogy in two ways. They were using it to refer to the Christian ethos of the school, and to talk about RE. Hearing the teachers talk about it and analysing their responses helped me to ascertain more clearly how I would use the analogy in the final proposition.

As a result of this discussion, I became more aware that I had also used the analogy of an embrace to explain the relationship between RE and the Christian ethos of the school, i.e. that both are distinct, but are in a relationship, an 'embrace'. However, I also acknowledged that I had used the analogy to help understand what I meant by each of my three principles. This thinking was less well developed at this stage and not presented to the focus group. As a result of the focus group, I decided to develop this aspect further and undertake an active contemplation for each pedagogical principle to explain my thinking through a visual picture. This is presented in Chapter Nine where I include vignettes about an embrace to represent each principle as a visual picture. Therefore, I have used an embrace as an analogy for the notions of creating space, encountering Christ through encountering others, and listening for wisdom to a greater degree in my final proposition than I put forward at the end of Chapter Six.

### **7.9.2 Visual representations of hospitality**

Teachers were also invited to actively contemplate a number of different pictures of hospitality (Appendix Seven). The aim behind this activity was to consider whether images of hospitality were more useful than images of embrace in terms of understanding the principles of pedagogy. Having reflected on these images the teachers talked about the warmth and openness of hospitality, the importance of '*open doors*' and '*light shining out*' (Teacher A), and a sense of '*joy*' and '*happy conversation*' (Teacher D). They talked about the inclusive nature of hospitality and that all were welcome (Teachers A and B).

*'There is excitement, that buzz, that feeling everybody is included...there is not one person there that is in charge, they all seem to be part of everything, it's really happy and buzzy and you'd hope that is what your RE lessons at school would be like'*  
(Teacher B)

*'There is a gathering round an open table and the circle is open, so there is a way into that...'* (Teacher A)

The teachers were asked what image of hospitality they thought should go on the front of the thesis, if it was to sum up the three principles we had explored together. They suggested,

*'The innkeeper of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, with some beer...'*  
(Teacher D)

*'An open door, a table laden with food, opportunity to come....'*  
(Teacher A)

*'Lots of people because they want to be there, maybe half a circle, different types of shapes of people...'* (Teacher B)

These all suggest welcome and an invitation to take part in something whether that be a meal, conversation, drink or just being included in a space.

There was agreement amongst the teachers that the terms 'embrace' and 'hospitality' were similar. They said both were about welcome and encouraging people, and both could imply open arms.

*'Hospitality is about encouraging people, having a welcome, welcoming people into that embrace... so they are not mutually exclusive'* (Teacher A)

However, Teacher D felt that hospitality could be seen as duty whereas an embrace implied love.

*'I think embrace is warmer than hospitality, hospitably could almost be dutiful, but embrace implies the love...'* (Teacher D)

The teacher here sees hospitality in a different sense to that suggested through my analysis of the biblical sources and conceptual literature.

Teacher D sees hospitality more in terms of a Derridian conditional hospitality, where perhaps reciprocity is expected. However, her view of an embrace could apply to unconditional hospitality or to the view of hospitality presented through the biblical analysis and conceptual literature review. The concepts of embrace and hospitality are therefore intrinsically connected. However, it is the use of the word 'love' that is particularly powerful in this teacher's comment, since it implies that the role of the teacher goes beyond duty to something deeper. It recalls one of the key concepts identified through the biblical analysis, which was the Old Testament belief in covenant love.

## **7.10 Conclusions based on my interpretation and analysis of the focus group discussions**

In light of my analysis and interpretation of the focus group discussions, I have outlined a summary of my conclusions drawing together all the observations and critique from teachers noted in the previous discourse. The emerging themes are grouped according to the purpose of RE and the three principles as this was the most helpful way to apply the conclusions to my final proposition in the following chapters and have been substantiated using teacher comments in the previous pages. There are fourteen emerging themes in total; four relate to the purpose of RE, one to creating space, three to encountering Christ through encountering others, three to listening for wisdom and three that apply to all three principles.

### **7.10.1 The Purpose of RE**

#### **Theme 1: The purpose of religious education in Church of England schools as understood by these participants lacked clarity**

Throughout the first focus group session participants showed a lack of clarity about the purpose of the subject. Whilst there was general agreement that RE is about more than just gaining knowledge, there were contradictions in the responses given. There was uncertainty about how their own purpose for the subject related to that advocated in Church of England documentation.



**Theme 2: The purpose of religious education reflected the teacher's own worldview and broader understanding of the purpose of education**

Responses from participants indicated that the understanding of the purpose of RE is intrinsically linked to the teacher's own view of the purpose of education itself. For example, some participants see education in terms of nurture and this is reflected in their responses. The worldview of the teacher is evident in the comments participants gave in relation to both their understanding of purpose and to the pedagogy they chose to use in the classroom.

**Theme 3: The purpose of religious education and choice of pedagogy reflected the teacher's context**

Whilst the participants showed some theoretical understanding of the purpose of RE (even if confused and contradictory) and the appropriate pedagogy to use, this was not reflected in descriptions of their practice. There was a disconnect between how they understand the purpose of RE and the pedagogy they used in the classroom. Participants' responses indicated this was largely due to the impact of their own (school) context and to some degree the way their religious education curriculum was constructed.

**Theme 4: The understanding of the relationship between the Christian ethos in a Church of England Primary school (and its mission) and religious education as understood by the participants was confused**

Participant responses showed that the relationship between the mission of the Church of England as outlined in *Going for Growth* (Church of England, 2010, p.11) and the aims in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2011) caused confusion for the teacher of RE in practical terms.

**7.10.2 Creating Space**

**Theme 5: Creating space was conceived as more than physical space**

Participant responses showed that space was conceived primarily in emotional, intellectual and psychological terms, rather than physical. Participants saw value in creating space which was safe, open and free, yet had boundaries to allow pupils to take risks and ask questions. The

connection between emotional and intellectual space was felt to be strong in RE, with an emphasis on the importance of focusing pupils around the subject to be learned.

### **7.10.3 Encountering Christ, through encountering others**

#### **Theme 6: The use of the word 'Christ' caused confusion about the purpose of RE**

Whilst the majority of participants thought the term 'Christ' should be retained in this principle for pedagogy, evidence from the discussions showed that it caused confusion and could be regarded as exclusive. Some participants felt that their fellow teachers in school would need the principle explained very carefully to avoid the purpose and place of RE being misunderstood.

#### **Theme 7: These teachers felt the encounter should enable the children to understand religion 'from within'**

Participant responses indicated the importance of understanding the reality of religion, its authentic nature and being able to empathise with members from within a faith or belief community. The use of the word 'immersion' or 'experience' was used to describe the nature of an encounter, and participants placed emphasis on the use of story and narrative.

#### **Theme 8: These teachers felt the encounter should be 'real' reflecting the breadth of religious expression**

This theme is connected to the one above, in terms of understanding the real religious landscape in the world today. Participants stressed the need for pupils to understand the diversity of expression as part of their encounter with others.

### **7.10.4 Listening for Wisdom**

#### **Theme 9: Listening for wisdom was conceived as more than gaining knowledge**

Participants agreed that this principle implied more than just being knowledgeable about religion and belief. Their responses indicated a focus on application of knowledge and responding with wisdom in the everyday.

All emphasised some kind of 'change' which would take place in the pupil and teacher as a result of 'listening for wisdom'.

#### **Theme 10: Listening for wisdom is usually done collectively**

Participant responses showed that an enquiry process was assumed as central to the process of listening for wisdom, and within this a notion that this process was collective. Nevertheless, the importance of solitude and stillness was still seen to be a valuable part of this principle.

#### **Theme 11: Listening for wisdom takes time**

Participant responses showed that the importance of time in listening for wisdom can be conceived in different ways. Some stressed the importance of time for each aspect of learning to support depth of learning, and others emphasised the fact that listening for wisdom takes place over a much longer period of time as relationships develop and pupils draw on a range of experiences.

### **7.10.5 Themes relating to all three principles**

#### **Theme 12: The effective implementation of the principles is dependent on the context of the teacher and how they interpret them**

Not only is the purpose of RE influenced by the context of the teacher, but the effectiveness of the three principles is also dependent on the context of the teacher and how they interpret the principles. This relates both to how the principles are understood at different Key Stages and by different teachers through their own worldview. It is evident that the pedagogical principles put forward in this thesis will be interpreted differently in different contexts. This means that teachers will interpret them from within their own worldview. They will consider whether the principles match their own values and broader understanding of education more generally. A negative impact of creating principles is that they only remain principles and are not implemented because of the impact of context on their interpretation.

Therefore, I became more aware of the need to ensure the final version of the principles were acceptable, coherent and accessible to all teachers in Church of England schools.

### **Theme 13: The importance of the ontological nature of being the teacher in terms of host-guest**

The participants used host-guest language in their discussions to describe the teacher as both teacher and learner at the same time. They also described the pupils as teachers or 'hosts' in the discussion sessions. This indicated that the interplay of host-guest may be helpful in the RE classroom.

### **Theme 14: The principles could be applied to subjects other than religious education**

Participants suggested that the principles, particularly the idea of 'creating space', could be applied to subjects other than RE.

## **7.11 Implications for constructing my principles of pedagogy**

The focus group clarified and refined the three pedagogical principles, and challenged some of my use of language. In addition, it reinforced the importance of establishing a very clear purpose for RE in schools within the wider context of the Church of England mission. Lastly, it helped me to articulate more clearly how I had used analogies in multiple ways and that I needed to ensure I presented my use of them clearly in the final proposition. I now summarise the specific impact the focus group conclusions will have on my final principles.

### **7.11.1 The purpose of RE**

In order for the principles of pedagogy to have a context in which to be placed, the purpose of RE in Church of England schools and in particular its relationship to the Christian ethos needs to be defined. Principles for pedagogy are intrinsically connected to purpose. If the purpose is clear, the principles will make more sense. This was evident in Chapter One where purpose and pedagogy were found to be inseparable. In light of the focus group, it is evident that if a clearer purpose is established then issues such as the teachers' own context can be worked through and addressed. Therefore, I decided a more detailed chapter on the relationship between the Christian ethos and RE would need to be written, and that this would focus more specifically on the analogy of an embrace.

### **7.11.2 Creating Space**

The focus group primarily confirmed my own thinking on this principle. In particular the notion that the space is more than physical space, and that there was a connection between the emotional and intellectual space. This principle was therefore developed along the lines originally planned.

### **7.11.3 Encountering Christ, through encountering others**

This was the most contentious of the three principles and as a result changes were made to the final wording. A focus was placed more on the word 'encounter', rather than the word 'Christ'. This ensured that the purpose of RE and related pedagogy were clearly aligned and misunderstandings could be avoided. The focus on encounter encompasses more explicitly the notion of coming alongside others and understanding religion from within, rather than on encountering Christ specifically. As the encountering takes place within a Christian ethos, the opportunity to encounter Christ still remains possible, but is not explicit, planned for or expected. The encounter will also focus on the breadth and diversity of the field of enquiry within the world today. Lastly, the teachers' views mirrored my own views about the importance of authenticity and the lived reality of religion, and this element will be strengthened.

### **7.11.4 Listening for wisdom**

Like creating space, the themes emerging from discussions about this principle confirmed my initial hypothesis. However, there was a specific element related to 'time' that needed to be considered in the final wording of the principle. On the whole, the teachers' understanding of the principle of listening for wisdom supported my own thinking, and also provided examples of what this could look like in the classroom.

### **7.11.5 The use of analogy and visual representation**

The use of an embrace as an analogy and visual representations of hospitality were only emerging ideas when I introduced them to the focus

group. The use of an image-based method was unusual in this particular kind of research, but the focus group confirmed to me not only its validity, but its effectiveness in understanding complex ideas as part of a hermeneutical process. The focus group discussions indicated that both the analogy of embrace and visual representations of hospitality were useful, as long as they are explained and used carefully. The teachers saw the value in both to varying degrees, and their interpretations and reflections suggested they may be helpful in explaining my principles. As a result of the focus group I also realised I had used the analogy of embrace in multiple ways. This was not an issue in itself because I had not formed the final proposition and I could ensure that I provided clarity in the next stage of the research process.

As a result, I decided to use the analogy for both the relationship between the Christian ethos and RE, as well as the principles of pedagogy themselves. This twofold use of the analogy brought a sense of coherence to the whole thesis and reflected the ideas arising from the focus group. I widened my reading further to clarify what I meant by 'embrace', and with the encouragement from the focus group enhanced its place within the next two chapters where I present the final proposition. I have retained the title 'A Pedagogy of Embrace' for my thesis, as this unifies the two research questions and summarises the heart of my proposition.

#### **7.11.6 Reflections on the process as a lived pedagogy**

The ontological nature of the principles and the importance of 'being the teacher', and the interplay between host-guest were highlighted by teachers without my prompting. I decided therefore to make this a larger part of the final hypothesis and build on the notion of 'being the host'. In addition, the focus group itself became an example of living out the pedagogical principles themselves. The focus group began by creating space. The space was based on openness and inclusivity, whilst acknowledging the tensions, disagreements and boundaries of the setting. Ground rules were set so that teachers felt comfortable to share their experiences, in some cases they put themselves in vulnerable positions. The teachers encountered new ideas through the 'story' of my thesis so far. They encountered the subject, but also encountered one another's stories,

learning from one another in the process. The group listened collectively for wisdom. The teachers listened to the principles and analogies I shared, but then collectively shaped them. Intellectual hospitality was implied from the start as the teachers and myself opened our minds to new interpretations and ways of understanding. Lastly, I was being the host, but on occasion the teachers, my guests, taught me and challenged me in my own thinking. In this sense I became the guest and they became the hosts. The focus group itself therefore expressed, or lived out, the pedagogical principles I am putting forward.

During the focus group work I was continuing to read further documents about hospitality, some of which were as a direct result of the focus group discussions. This reflected the hermeneutical nature of the research, and how one aspect can have an impact on the whole. This further reading included documents by feminist and womanist writers, and also those relating to other curriculum areas such as music because the focus group had talked about other subject areas. In this sense, the hermeneutical spiral was taking place, as discussions led to further reading, which then led to further questions to the group. The end result was a deepening of my own understanding of how my principles should be shaped and articulated so they can be understood by teachers and have an impact on classroom practice.

## **7.12 Conclusions**

The focus group enabled me to refine and clarify my own thinking. They were an honest and reflective group of teachers who challenged me, and provided insights into how the pedagogical principles might work out in practice. In the next chapter I outline my proposition showing how the place and purpose of RE can be understood in Church of England schools, before outlining my final theoretical framework for pedagogy in Church of England schools based on three principles in Chapter Nine.

## **Chapter 8. Hospitality and Embrace: Visualising the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools**

In the next two chapters I put forward my final proposition based on a theology of hospitality. This first part, Chapter Eight, puts forward a way of understanding the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools. It draws on an understanding of hospitality as mission based on the analysis of biblical narratives (Chapter Four), particularly on the conceptual literature review (Chapter Five) and the insights from the focus group (Chapter Seven). The second part, which follows in Chapter Nine, puts forward a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools. The framework is set out as a series of principles which would underpin a pedagogical approach for RE in Church of England schools. These principles are based on the conclusions drawn from the analysis of biblical narratives (Chapter Four) and the conceptual literature review (Chapter Five), and refined through engagement with my focus group (Chapter Seven).

In this chapter, alongside the use of a theology of hospitality, I am using the concept of an embrace as a visual representation for the place of RE within the mission of Church of England schools. My focus group affirmed that visual representation, primarily through a process of active contemplation, could be useful in explaining concepts, particularly to teachers. As a result, I gained confidence to use 'embrace' as an analogy in both parts of my final proposition. Since the use of 'embrace' was in its early conception prior to the focus group study, I explain in more detail here why this concept lies at the heart of my thesis.

### **8.1 The use of the term embrace**

The use of the 'embrace' demonstrates my thinking through visual representation. The use of an 'embrace' is referred to in Chapter Five. For some authors, it was a passing comment (Homan and Pratt 2007) while for others it lay at the heart of their work (Volf, 1996; Ross, 2008; Smith, 2009; Nouwen, 1998, 2000; Palmer 1993). In particular, Volf (1996) placed a great emphasis on the concept of embrace in his work on reconciliation and overcoming the dangers of exclusion in contemporary society. The focus



group findings suggested that the term 'embrace' may be too intimate for use in the context of this research, and particularly as a title for my thesis. Here, I am therefore clarifying why I have continued to use this analogy, and in fact utilised it more extensively than originally intended.

When we think of an embrace, we may associate it with intimacy, and often romance. A quick scan of a thesaurus (Collins, 1991) indicates synonyms such as caress, enfold, smooch, squeeze and cuddle. These all refer to physical embracing, and may seem too intimate for us to use in relation to RE. However, if one embraces something, such as an idea, then the meaning of an embrace changes. Embracing can then mean acceptance, support or adopting. Implied within an embrace is a sense of receiving something from someone else and welcoming it. If understood in this way, the term embrace has less intimate overtones. The sense of intimacy was refuted by Volf (1996, p.141) who explained that embrace can encompass anything from a handshake to lying side by side. For Volf, it is the relationship and symbolism between the self and the other which the embrace represents that is crucial. It is for this reason that I have decided to pursue it as an analogy. By positively taking this less intimate view the word embrace provides a useful visual representation of my hypothesis. An embrace suggests many things to me. It suggests child-like openness to the other; it suggests freedom; it suggests a need for the other; it suggests acceptance; it suggests encircling without strangling; it suggests affection; it suggests inclusion; it suggests taking on new ideas and perspectives; it suggests protection; it suggests movement; it suggests entwining; it suggests harmony yet distinctiveness. An embrace is therefore a rich visual analogy that can be used to explain a complex idea.

Palmer (1993), writes of 'knowing' as an act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In this sense, an embrace is one of mutual dependency (1993, p.8). An authentic understanding of self (our essence) through the embracing of the other is seen in the work of Thomas Merton (1979, p.3). Merton is concerned with educating in love, and shows how learning occurs through genuine relationships and an interconnectedness with the world. These notions of embrace reflect the ideas of Teacher D in my focus group who said that embrace shows love.

In order to broaden my understanding of an 'embrace' and build on this notion of embrace being more than an expression of intimacy, I listened to a TED Global talk by actor Thandie Newton (2011). She speaks about embracing otherness as embracing herself. She shows how embracing is about understanding and acceptance, and finding connection with the world. She explains how the notion of self is actually a projection of what others think we are or who they want us to be, not who we really are. She states that the focus on 'self' has led to disillusionment, but that there is hope through oneness. She argues we need to understand the reality and authenticity of oneness; what she terms as 'our essence'. She continues by saying that when self is suspended we become earthed in our essence. She argues that for her this happens when she acts and dances. In these moments, she claims she loses her 'self' and is connected to everything; her senses are alert and alive, connecting with the earth, the audience, the air and the space. She maintains that to live fully means living in oneness where there is an emphasis on interconnectedness with the world, with people, rather than living in the disconnectedness of self. She talks of finding our essence, our connection with the infinite and every other living thing, this is what she means by embracing. This means that embracing can be seen as interconnectedness between our inner being (essence or oneness), others and the world. This notion of embrace as interconnectedness with the self, others and the world provides another layer of interpretation which is useful when applying the analogy to my hypothesis. Connectedness does not mean that two things become one, but that they are distinct yet related. Therefore, Newton's understanding of the term embrace is less intimate. In fact, it implies outreach and a sense of connection with the other and the world around us.

Volf (1996, pp.141ff) provides a helpful way of understanding the act of embracing another. For him, an embrace must have the four elements or 'acts'. These are opening the arms, waiting, closing arms, and then opening them again. The open arms indicate creation of space and invitation. Waiting suggests acceptance of reciprocity, the embrace is not an act of invasion. Closing the arms indicates the host is guest and the guest is host as each person makes their presence felt. Volf sees this as especially powerful because the identity of the self is both preserved and transformed. Lastly, the opening of the arms shows that the two people have not become

one, but remain two with their difference and uniqueness.

I am aware that I have used the analogy of an 'embrace' in two different ways in my thesis. I have used it to illustrate the relationship between RE and the mission of the Church school in this chapter, but I have also used it to illustrate the pedagogical principles for RE in Chapter Nine. After much consideration I have decided to use this analogy in both cases. This is partly because the focus group used the analogy in both senses in their conversations as outlined in Chapter Seven. It is also because I have found both uses of the term 'embrace' helpful in developing my own understanding. It has provided both different layers of interpretation and a way of expressing a conceptual relationship (i.e the Christian mission of the Church and RE) which is hard to express in words.

## **8.2 Understanding the purpose and place of religious education in Church of England schools**

At the end of Chapter Two I suggested that the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools were confused. I then went on to suggest that my hypothesis would draw on a theology of hospitality to provide clarity both in terms of the purpose of RE and in terms of a pedagogical framework. In this chapter, I will explain the tensions between the mission of the church school and the purpose of RE. I then put forward a theory to resolve these issues based on an understanding of mission as hospitality which builds on the preliminary proposition. I then represent this visually through the notion of an embrace.

### **8.2.1 Understanding the tensions**

In order to understand the tensions between the mission of the church school and the purpose of RE, I have created a series of diagrams illustrating different models for the relationship between the two.



Figure 10: Relationship of RE and the mission of the Church of England, Model 1 (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

This first diagram (Figure 10) shows one way of thinking about the purpose of RE in Church schools. It shows RE contained within the mission of the church, and therefore influenced and shaped by it. The danger of this model is that RE becomes subsumed by the Christian ethos and therefore its purpose becomes blurred with faith formation. In this situation, RE fundamentally becomes focused on personal and spiritual development along the lines outlined in *The Way Ahead* (Church of England, 2001) report. In some schools this has led to a focus on development of pupils' moral awareness (Church of England, 2014, p.13) or limiting the teaching of Christianity to values (ibid., p. 21). In this case, therefore, the aims of RE as outlined in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2011, 2016) and in the *Norfolk Agreed Syllabus* (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012) are lost. Evidence also indicates that this leads to poorer pupil outcomes and low standards (Church of England, 2014, p.8).

Figure 11: Relationship of RE and the mission of the Church of England, Model 2 (Kathryn Wright, 2016)



This second diagram (Figure 11) shows the opposite way of thinking about the purpose of RE. In this diagram, RE and the ethos of the school/mission of the Church are disconnected. The two are seen as separate entities and

with entirely different purposes. RE is primarily seen as an academic subject like any other subject in the curriculum. RE may contribute to the ethos of the school, but this is more by accident than design. This does not reflect any of the Church of England documentation. If a school took this view then they would find it hard to meet the requirement for the RE to contribute to the Christian ethos of the school as outlined in the *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools* (Church of England, 2013). They would also not be fulfilling the vision for education in the Church of England (2016) because this requires all aspects of school, including RE, to promote a Christian vision based on wisdom, hope, community and dignity (2016, p.11)

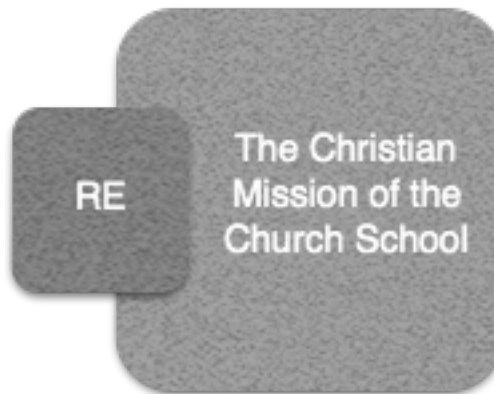


Figure 12: Relationship of RE and the mission of the Church of England, Model 3 (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

This diagram (Figure 12) shows some connection between RE and the Christian ethos, but does not fully meet the requirement for children to have a life-enhancing encounter with Jesus Christ, or to be part of the mission of Church schools. RE and the Christian ethos in this diagram sit quite comfortably next to each other, but the one does not inform the other, one does not contribute to the other, nor are they shaped by each other. There are likely to be missed opportunities here for pupils to encounter Christianity fully in the terms outlined in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2011, 2016) and in *The Way Ahead* report (2001). For example, pupils might use theological language about the Trinity in collective worship as part of the ethos of the school (Church of England, 2013), but not follow this up in RE lessons in terms of understanding the

nature of this language or exploring what it means.

Figure 13: Relationship of RE and the mission of the Church of England, 'The Embrace' (Kathryn Wright, 2016)



This final diagram (Figure 13) shows where I believe RE should sit in relationship with the Christian ethos of the school. It is an embrace. The RE is distinct from the Christian ethos and mission of the Church. It can fulfil its own purpose, yet it can also contribute to and be shaped by the Christian ethos of the school without falling into faith formation. This means having a very clear understanding of what is meant by RE within a Church school context; for example, by grasping clearly the aims concerning religious literacy as identified in the revised *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016). It also means having a very clear understanding of the relationship that RE has with the Christian ethos and the mission of the church. *The Making a Difference?* (Church of England, 2014) report states,

Where RE was most effective, the primary purpose to develop pupils' expertise in understanding religion and belief, their religious literacy, was the context for the wider goals of fostering their personal development, nurturing a search for meaning and encountering the Christian faith. In the best cases RE was seen as an important subject alongside other subjects, with its own intellectual integrity and rigour.

(Church of England, 2014, p.7)

Here an 'embrace' is implied as RE is distinct, but also sits within the Christian ethos. Although the revised *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) is clearer in terms of its aims, I have shown in Chapter Two that the place and purpose of RE are still not clearly explained or understood in public documentations. It is my assertion that in order for schools to uphold these aims of RE and understand the place of the subject

in Church schools, a new understanding of the relationship of RE and the Christian mission of the church is required. My hypothesis is that understanding mission through a theology of hospitality helps to clarify this relationship, and that an analogy of an embrace is a helpful way to express this visually.

### **8.2.2 Hospitality as mission, mission as hospitality**

Drawing on my biblical analysis (Chapter Four) and the conceptual literature review (Chapter Five) and specifically on the work of Ross (2008), understanding mission as hospitality releases the tension between the function of religious education as a rigorous academic subject and at the same time its role within the mission of the Church of England.

If as the *Way Ahead* (Church of England, 2001) and *Going for Growth* (Church of England, 2010) reports assert, church schools are at the heart of the missionary work of the church, then Ross's (2008) analysis of hospitality as illustrating '*The Five Marks of Mission*' (Anglican Consultative Council, 1984) is significant since it has the potential to help Church schools to understand the relationship between mission and the purpose and place of religious education. According to both reports, '*The Five Marks of Mission*' should be at the centre of a Church school ethos, including their approach to religious education. The metaphor of hospitality is useful in this sense as the term 'evangelism' or even 'mission' may seem confessional and even threatening or confrontational to teachers, particularly for those with no Christian faith commitment or with other religious or non-religious beliefs. However, mission as hospitality provides a more coherent rationale for what a church school is about, and more precisely provides a way forward for positioning religious education within this. This notion is further strengthened by comments made by the Bishop of Huntingdon in 2015 during a speech made to school leaders when he used a metaphor of 'warm fires and open doors',

By Warm Fires I mean a vibrant and attractive sense of our Christian identity, and by Open Doors I mean a real welcome to anyone and everyone to gather round the fire... We would be far worse off if either we lost the clarity and warmth of the fire at the centre, or started to close the door on some because they are not already committed to it enough. We need to combine good strong roots, a robust sense of

church and school alike as Christian or “in Christ”; with a very open door always inviting but never forcing, leaving room for questioning, doubt, disagreement, journeying and just looking.

(The Fruits of the Spirit: A Church of England Discussion Paper on Character Education, 2015, p.13)

If mission is understood in these terms then RE can contribute to and be an active part of the mission of the Church of England. The embrace can be achieved, and interconnectedness can take place.

I now demonstrate what this interpretation of mission as hospitality might mean for understanding the purpose and place of RE. In particular this draws on the work of Ross (2008) and my reading of the Rule of St. Benedict (Verheyen, 1949). If mission is seen as creating space and providing room for all, then RE can do this. If mission is regarded as being welcome and an encounter, then RE should enable this to happen in the classroom. If mission is considered as a search for meaning and purpose, then RE supports this aim. If mission is deemed to be about meeting those on the margins and understanding the impact of faith and belief on lives, communities and society, then RE can make a significant contribution to this. If mission is about being a host who empties themselves so they can welcome the other, then RE provides a forum for this to take place. If mission is about listening to others, about engaging with ‘the stranger’, then RE should be enabling this to happen through its teaching and learning approach. RE can sit comfortably within this understanding of mission as hospitality, yet can at the same time remain distinct as an academic subject.

If one returns to the themes arising from the biblical narratives (Chapter Four) in relation to hospitality, RE can embrace the Christian mission of the school. For example, RE is about meeting the needs of all and understanding others. It explores diversity and the experience of those on the margins. It is about listening to the stories of others and learning from them. It provides opportunities for encounter with others, where change and transformation can take place. If mission is seen as hospitality then RE can embrace this mission without compromising its position as an academic subject. Therefore, understanding mission through hospitality ensures that the aims laid out for RE in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of



England, 2016) can be achieved within the context of the *Church of England Vision for Education* (Church of England, 2016) which reinforces the notion of schools as part of the Church's mission. It enables an embrace to take place.

### **8.2.3 Visual representation through an embrace**

Figure 13 above is a visual representation of the relationship between RE and the Christian mission or ethos of a Church school. It shows an embrace. A religious education which has clear purpose and definition, yet enriches and is enriched by the Christian ethos of the school, would seem to me to be the primary desired outcome based on my analysis of Church of England literature in Chapter Two. This lies at the heart of the recommendations of the *Making a difference?* (Church of England, 2014) report and the *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools* schedule (Church of England, 2013). Over the last 20 years, the many Church of England reports cited in Chapter Two have sought to put this rationale forward, but have not articulated it in a way which teachers and other educators have been able to grasp accurately or interpret fully.

Firstly, by having a clear purpose the quality of RE can be improved (Church of England, 2014; Ofsted, 2013) and this will impact on pedagogy and curriculum design to ensure pupil outcomes are improved and standards raised. The revised *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) and work by Chipperton et al. (2016) have sought to clarify the purpose of RE as developing religious literacy. This purpose of RE has been cited not only in Church of England publications in the last two years, but in reports such as *REforReal* (Dinham and Shaw, 2015) and *Living with Difference* (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015). However, these documents alone are not enough to ensure that the purpose and place of RE are fully understood within the Church school context. The analogy of an embrace can help teachers to grasp the relationship between the mission of the Church and the purpose of RE as a rigorous, academic subject (Church of England, 2016). If an analogy of an embrace is adopted then the RE will be distinct, yet in relationship with the Christian mission of the school. They will be interconnected.

To help explain this notion further, I have imagined an 'embrace' and undertaken an active contemplation on the words of Volf (1995, 1996). I

therefore express my understanding of the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools as an embrace (Figure 14).

**Religious education and the Christian mission of the school  
visualised as an embrace**

*'I am religious education. I open my arms to create space for the Christian mission of my school. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be separate from everything else that takes place in our school; I give an open invitation for the Christian mission to come in and feel at home within my subject. In this embracing of the Christian mission, I want it to become part of what I do, but at the same time maintain my identity as a rigorous, academic subject whose aim is to develop religious literacy, not to nurture children into the Christian faith. By becoming part of me, the ethos enriches me, but I remain true to myself. I am distinct and free, yet in harmony with the ethos of my school'.*

*'I am the Christian mission of the school. I open my arms to welcome religious education, but I know that it has another purpose and aim to me. I welcome it because it helps me to understand who I am better, it provides a depth of understanding. By entering into a relationship with religious education I see its connections with myself yet its distinctiveness'.*

Figure 14: An active contemplation on the words of Volf (1995, 1996)  
(Kathryn Wright, 2016)

### 8.3 Conclusions

The purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools are best understood within the context of mission as hospitality. This rationale allows teachers to be able to see clearly how RE can contribute to the Christian mission, without it becoming faith formation.

This relationship between the Christian mission as hospitality and RE can be visualised through an embrace where both are distinct but welcoming of one another.

## **Chapter 9. A Pedagogy of Embrace: Pedagogical principles for Religious Education in Church of England Schools**

Having now established an understanding of the relationship between RE and the mission of Church schools through Christian hospitality and the analogy of embrace, I now show how RE can draw on a theology of hospitality to establish a pedagogical framework. The distinctiveness of RE in a Church school lies in its embracing of a pedagogy that is rooted in Christian hospitality. In all other respects it is the same as RE in any other school in terms of its function and purpose to promote religious literacy. This is supported by the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016). To put it another way, I argue that the best way of promoting religious literacy in Church of England schools is specifically through pedagogical principles rooted in a Christian theology of hospitality.

This pedagogical framework is based on three principles arising from a theology of hospitality as outlined in my preliminary proposition (Chapter Six). The three principles arise from my biblical analysis (Chapter Four) and conceptual literature review (Chapter Five), and through the refining process of my empirical study (Chapter Seven). Each principle will be explained in turn referring back to the biblical analysis and conceptual literature showing how it is rooted in hospitality and what this means for RE. Some additional sources and documents have been referred to in this chapter to provide further clarity and to shape the principles in light of focus group feedback. In addition to the principles, some suggestions are made in terms of pedagogical procedures or strategies. These are rooted particularly in the insights from the focus group and are woven through the narrative. I consider practical implications of each principle at the end of each section. Towards the end of the chapter I consider possible limitations of my principles in terms of transferability, implementation and links to other pedagogical approaches.

The three pedagogical principles for religious education in Church of England schools are:

- Creating Space.
- Encountering Others.

- Listening for wisdom.

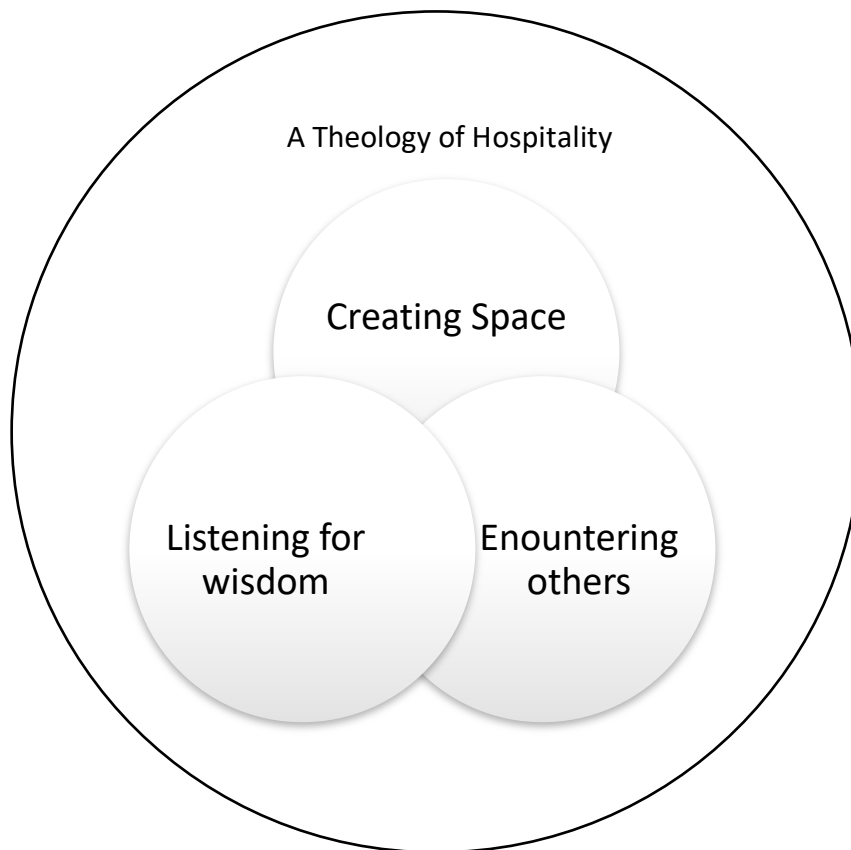


Figure 15: A Pedagogy of Embrace: A diagram showing the final three pedagogical principles within a theological framework (Kathryn Wright, 2017)

### 9.1 A lived pedagogy

As outlined in Chapter Six, underpinning all three principles is the concept of a lived pedagogy. By this I mean that the principles which are to be lived out by the teacher (the focus here is on the teacher, but it would also be possible for the pupil to live out the pedagogy as I intimate below) are ontological in nature. This concept arises from both the biblical narratives (Chapter Four), in particular the interplay between host-guest, and the conceptual literature (York, 2002; Nouwen, 1998; Westfield, 2001; O’Gorman, 2006; Palmer, 2007; McAvoy, 1998). This means that the principles I put forward are primarily about ‘being’ a teacher rather than what the teacher does. This means the teacher will **be** one who creates space, seeks encounters and listens for wisdom. This takes precedence over what the teacher does in terms of technique or strategy. It is the teacher’s presence as host-guest through the living out of the principles

that lies at the heart of my thesis.

The idea that pedagogy is more than just teaching is not new. The origin of the word pedagogy, from the Greek *paidagōgia*, means 'to lead a child' and was used in reference to the slave who escorted Greek children to school. Therefore, the term was synonymous with the person, as well as with what they did. The ontological nature of pedagogy is therefore implied in the earliest use of the term. Alexander (2008) maintains that pedagogy is more than an act of teaching. It includes the ideas, beliefs and values by which the act of teaching is informed, sustained and justified (2008, p.4). In addition, I am aware that my notion of a lived pedagogy has parallels with the work of Paulo Friere (1968, translated by Ramos, 1970) and the concept of social and critical pedagogies (Smith, 2012)

To use the language of hospitality, living out the pedagogy, is about **being** a host. A host does things such as laying a table, welcoming people, opening a door, inviting people in, but this is not the true nature of a host. Being host is more than making hospitality (Westfield, 2001), it is about giving one's presence to another person (York, 2002). This is perhaps best demonstrated through the biblical narrative of Jesus' encounter with two people on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-34). In this episode Jesus comes alongside two people, he becomes part of their lives. He gives them his presence. In this sense he is the guest, he is a 'true visitor' (Smith, 2009). Yet it is in this encounter that he also becomes the host. When the two people recognise Jesus a transformation takes place and he becomes the host. Therefore, it is through Jesus' presence that true hospitality occurs. It is not located in a place or about what people do. This rationale lies at the heart of my hypothesis.

Therefore, the three principles are rooted in the concept of **being** a host who by her nature lives them out. If the principles of pedagogy are lived out by the teacher, as host, then I argue that a state of being is created where the pupils, as guests, can flourish, and this also lies at the heart of the new *Church of England Vision for Education* (Church of England, 2016, p.5). However, as will be noted the pupil can also **be** the host, and the teacher can **be** the guest, so enabling all to learn and all to flourish. Therefore, if the principles of pedagogy are to be lived out effectively then the teacher must be open to the idea of not only being the host, but being the guest; because

in becoming the guest they actually show the deepest and most profound understanding of what it means to be the host.

## **9.2 A pedagogy of embrace**

As I explained in the previous chapter, I am using the analogy of an embrace in two different ways. In Chapter Eight, I have used it to explain the relationship between RE and the mission of the Church of England. In this chapter, I use it as an analogy for each of my three principles of pedagogy for RE. Through a process of active contemplation on the notion of embrace, as conceived in my mind, I articulate in a more reflective way the three principles of my pedagogical framework. The embrace expresses visually and physically the idea of space, encounter and listening. The embrace also reflects the concept of a lived pedagogy. The embrace is explored in terms of what it suggests about living out the pedagogical principles, and what this means for the teacher in an ontological sense. The embrace is a representation or symbol of all that RE pedagogy can be. In this chapter, the active contemplations on the concept of embrace are presented as vignettes at the end of each section.

## **9.3 Creating space**

The first of the three pedagogical principles to be identified is that of creating space. This is an empty, yet positive, space where openness and trust are paramount. The term 'empty' has negative connotations, so what I mean by this idea of space is free and clear, as opposed to unfilled or void. The Dutch word for hospitality is '*gastvrijheid*' which means the freedom of the guest (Nouwen, 1998, p.48). This is the sense of space which underpins this first principle.

Throughout the biblical narratives relating to hospitality (Chapter Four) creating space for theological and spiritual matters to be encountered is paramount. In my analysis of biblical narratives, I conclude that hospitality is subversive, particularly in the New Testament, often turning pharisaical cultural norms on their head and often allowing for an encounter with the Divine. The importance of love within hospitality is also strong, particularly through the concept of *hesed* (covenant love) and this underpins the nature of the space created. The conceptual literature (Chapter Five) indicated that hospitable space is where people feel and know they are valued, there

is trust and openness. In light of this, I now explain in detail what I mean by creating space as a pedagogical principle for RE.

### **9.3.1 What do I mean by 'space'?**

Understanding the nature of the 'space', and the fact that it is 'created', is fundamental to this principle. A state of being is created through the nature of the space itself and what happens in this space. It is not space that comes into existence of or by itself, but one which has purpose and specific dynamics. This sense of purpose and the characteristics of this space are now explored.

### **9.3.2 Purposeful Space**

In the biblical sources it is clear that hospitality served a purpose; for example, whether it is to indicate the nature of true worship (Isaiah 58:7) or whether to demonstrate something about the person of Jesus (Luke 9:10-17) hospitality has a clear function beyond just the eating of food or gathering of people. Hospitality is intrinsically linked to an encounter with the divine, primarily through an act of worship or service such as the Last Supper account (Luke 22); but also through dialogue and discussion, for example in the meeting with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Mary and Martha (Luke 10 :38-42) or The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Providing hospitality with purpose ensures that the notion of space is not vague or all-encompassing.

Within an RE context, the purposeful creation of space provides a framework for encountering others and listening for wisdom, the two other principles put forward. The purpose of the space is primarily enabling encounter to take place. The nature of this encounter will be explored alongside enabling listening for wisdom to occur later in this chapter. Without the creation of space, authentic and meaningful encounters are limited and the ability to listen for wisdom is stifled. Creating the space outlined here requires work and energy. It will take time and effort, however, this is what the host does. In the RE classroom, my assertion is that this is the task of the teacher. The teacher is the host who creates the space, they ensure it has purpose. She does this primarily through her presence as the host and understanding the purpose of RE clearly through the analogy of embrace.

### 9.3.3 Safe and Subversive Space

The biblical analysis indicates that the hospitable space is both safe and subversive. It is safe in the sense that it allows people to flourish and feel at home. This is demonstrated particularly through the Old Testament narratives such as those concerned with justice and the poor (Isaiah 58: 7) or the cities of refuge (Deuteronomy 4: 43). This is followed through in the New Testament with the emphasis on inclusiveness and the unconditional nature of hospitality. In addition, Jesus uses hospitality events as opportunities to subvert the norm (for example, Luke 7: 36-39). He turns cultural and religious conventions upside down. Based on these assertions, the space created in RE should therefore be both safe and subversive. This space is to be one which is not occupied by prefabricated, preformed answers, but where questions are to be explored openly and honestly. It is a safe space, where subversion can take place and where risks are expected to be taken. A place where questions are to be encouraged and topics about those on the margins are explored; this might include the controversial. This supports *Realising the Potential* (Ofsted, 2013) and *Norfolk Agreed Syllabus* (Norfolk Local Authority, 2012) enquiry-based approaches to learning in RE. In both documents, an enquiry process is advocated which encourages children and young people to ask their own questions. These are subsequently explored with teacher facilitation and guidance.

In order for effective enquiry to take place the right conditions for learning are essential. The Norfolk Syllabus emphasises this, but does not explain clearly how to achieve this. For example, it says,

a safe environment is created where all pupils are valued, so that they can confidently agree to disagree and express themselves freely.

(Norfolk Local Authority, 2012, p.20)

This suggests that understanding the purpose of the space and the importance of a safe environment is not enough. There needs to be due consideration to the exact nature of this purposeful and safe space and how it is created.

By rooting the creation of a safe, purposeful space within the context of



Christian hospitality the practical steps to achieving this space can be clearly outlined. I argue that for a safe space to be created, it must be:

- a values space
- an intellectually open space
- an inclusive and affirming space
- a solitary and silent space
- a collaborative space
- a slow and deep space

#### **9.3.4 Values Space**

Any space will have values that lie within it. The New Testament sources indicate that hospitality is rooted in values of humility, inclusion and acceptance of others (for example, Luke 14: 15-24). These are the values of what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God, and my analysis indicates that these values break through or subvert some of values of the time. In educational settings, the promoting of values has had much prominence for both positive and negative reasons in the last few years, the promotion of fundamental British Values being one example (Department for Education, 2014). Values will be distinct in different organisations. In a Church school setting the values will be Christian ones. The Church of England Discussion Paper on Character Education (2015) asserts that no education can be neutral. The values in a Church of England school will therefore be defined within the context of promoting 'life in all its fullness' (2015, p.3). The Church of England vision for education cites wisdom, hope, community and dignity as characterising a Christian education (2016, pp.11ff). Moreover, the *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS)* Inspection Framework (Church of England, 2013) sets out the expectation that the ethos of the school is to be rooted in Christian values which in turn are based on Christian beliefs.

Pupils should be learning in our church schools to their potential. Maximising learning is paramount. Learners have academic, personal and spiritual needs, all of which should be addressed in a loving environment where distinctively Christian values and teaching are

encountered.

(Church of England, 2013, p.6)

Many Church schools use a publication called *Values for Life* (Diocese of Gloucester, 2008). This publication sets out how values may be promoted through acts of collective worship, as well as links with other areas of the curriculum including RE and the wider Christian ethos of the school. It highlights the following values, all of which could be upheld in the 'values space',

Justice, forgiveness, peace, friendship, courage, creativity, generosity, service, wisdom, compassion, trust, respect and reverence, humility, truth, thankfulness, hope, perseverance and responsibility'.

(Diocese of Gloucester, 2008, p.4)

The values here are presented from a Christian perspective with explicit links to bible stories and application to daily life.

The Department for Education set out its definition of British Values. These are:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect
- tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs

(Department for Education, 2014)

Whilst the notion of actively promoting specific values as British is highly contested (see for example, Lander, 2016; Farrell, 2016), these five values can be seen as essential within the context of creating space in RE. A hospitable space will be one where children all have a voice and can be heard, where codes of conduct and rules of engagement in dialogue are understood and where views and opinions are accepted, and when appropriate challenged.

In general schools choose a small number of values they wish to hold as

central to their 'values space' which are shared and owned by their pupils, not just within RE lessons. If a school has chosen to focus for example on wisdom, hope and community, then these values must be upheld within the 'space' for it to function effectively. If my principle of creating space is to be followed, the values chosen should also reflect the Christian theology of hospitality. Mutual trust is perhaps one of the most important values, since trust removes any sense of fear. This was highlighted in Chapter Five. This would mean mutual trust between fellow pupils, but also between pupil and teacher, and where there is a shared purpose to learn together. The focus group also suggested that love, joy and thankfulness were values important for creating space in RE.

### **9.3.5 Intellectually Open Space**

The biblical narratives and conceptual literature show that space is not only physical and sensed, but mental and emotional. For example, Mary is identified by Jesus as a true host (Luke 10:38-42); one who does not try and fill space, but allows it to be filled. Someone who is filled with ideas, concepts and opinions cannot be a good host. They do not have the space to listen or discover. A closed mind means the other two principles of encounter and listening for wisdom will not be able to flourish.

I have already shown how McAvoy (1998) and Gallagher (2007) support this emphasis on intellectually open space. An open mind therefore, or a mind with space, is an essential starting point in RE. An effective pedagogy must allow pupils to lay aside assumptions and preconceived ideas, and come with questions. The true host allows space for their guests. This also applies to teachers as well as pupils. Teachers too must realise that they cannot completely drive the learning process, but must allow the collaborative process to drive it. This means shaping the learning and filling the space with collective ideas, rather than imposed ones. This enables true enquiry to take place. This results in an enquiry where there is sustained learning, where pupils can see the relevance of the learning, where pupils evaluate and draw conclusions, and where creativity and imagination flourish (Ofsted, 2013, pp.23-24). This idea is developed further in the third principle, listening for wisdom.

This means that learning in the space is open in terms of pathways, but is bounded by a destination (Palmer, 2007, p.77). So, there may be many

routes, but the destination of the learning journey is clear to the teacher. The teacher knows the objective of the learning and outcomes expected, but is open to the many ways in which these might be achieved and is open to the possibility that there may be different outcomes to those planned. To use an analogy, the teacher sets out the destination and invites the children to collaborate with them to determine how they might get there, perhaps by a combination of transport - road, rail, air - perhaps travelling directly or via new places they pass and discover on the way. The skiing analogy used in Chapter Three in relation to the methodology used in this thesis would be appropriate in this context. The teacher knows which piste the learning is taking place on, but sometimes the learning goes 'off piste' allowing for new discoveries. However, the teacher brings the learning back on piste when it is right to do so.

In addition, the openness of the space means that there is a sense that a destination may not be reached, but that many paths may be travelled; and of course, the possibility that a different destination may be reached (Palmer, 2007, p.77). This means that teachers, whilst having an expected outcome, may find that there are wider educational outcomes that become as, or even more important than the knowledge and understanding set out at the start of a unit of work. The sense of open space therefore applies as much to the teacher as the pupils themselves. The teacher may become the guest, and the pupils the host. There is an interplay here between the host-guest relationship. There is a strong sense of transformation in terms of learning through the openness of the space.

### **9.3.6 Inclusive and Affirming Space**

The space is also to be inclusive. There must be an openness towards a wide variety of different human experiences and expressions. Hospitality in the biblical narratives is about meeting the needs of guests on multiple levels such as in the narrative of the Feeding of the 5000 (Luke 9:10-17). Love, affection and a sense of belonging are identified by Maslow (1943, p.383) in his hierarchy of needs. Affirmation and inclusivity are an essential part of this fulfilment of need. A true host welcomes all - the unexpected, the downcast, the zealous. The true host offers themselves to all, and in the biblical material we see that Jesus is often host and guest. Offering oneself implies a sense of being the host and emphasises the ontological aspect.

There is also a sense here of the vulnerability of the teacher. This in many ways is like the teacher being both teacher and learner as highlighted above in terms of openness. In addition, for effective RE to take place the pupils are also both guests and hosts. They make contributions, they steer conversation, they lead the learning, and drive the thinking (REC, 2016). For a teacher to offer themselves as a learner or become the guest can be difficult because of fear (Palmer, 2007); fear of appearing ignorant, weak or even a fraud. The space created is therefore to be affirmed by all, and include all - involving the teacher and other adults in the space. This reflects Nouwen's (1998) notion that the teacher is also a learner and that they have something to offer their pupils.

In RE, this interplay and complexity of host and guest is helpful in terms of establishing appropriate pedagogy in RE. There should be fluidity between the notion of teacher and pupil, and how they engage with subject matter. For example, if I was to observe an RE lesson, to some degree the role of host and guest should be indistinguishable as both pupils and teachers learn and teach.

In addition, it is particularly important that all human experiences, beliefs and questions are acknowledged and affirmed within the RE classroom. In the biblical narratives, I have shown how Jesus responds within particular contexts, understanding the life situations of people (Luke 19:1-10, Luke 24:13-34). Life experiences may affect one's own spiritual journey or belief system, and as RE touches on and explores these matters in depth, it is vital that the curriculum is designed to enable space for these to be effectively explored.

### **9.3.7 Solitary and Silent Space**

The true host allows for silences. In the account of Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 10:38-42) it is Mary who demonstrates the nature of a true host by sitting at the feet of Jesus. She creates space by being there and not doing anything. Silence deepens our awareness of ourselves, others and if appropriate the divine. This was also reflected in the work of Homan and Pratt (2007) when writing about the balance between cloister, community and hospitality. Cloister was the time for being alone. At this time monks would meditate, study and exercise. Silence was an important part of the daily life of a monk (Verheyen, 1949, p.12). After compline,

silence was to be kept in order that the monks could reflect on the edifying words of scripture (ibid., p.52), unless the needs of a guest arose.

Children need to find their own voice so that they are able to articulate their own views and become more self-aware; this is found from within. In the active contemplation that follows, it was my inner voice that I allowed to speak to me in the cloister space. Children too need to find their own authentic voice by allowing silent space, they need what we might call 'cloister' moments. This connects with Newton's (2011) concept of essence and interconnectedness between the inner self and the world. Therefore, there should be space to reflect, and space where children do not have to speak in RE. All too often, pupils are silent because they are fearful (Palmer, 2007, p.46). Pupils remain silent to protect themselves and to survive. However, as Palmer (2007, p.47) indicates, the teacher-host should allow space for voices to be heard, not rushing to fill silence, but creating space for new ideas to flourish. Silent space becomes positive. As Lees (2012) has also suggested, silence has a purpose. In the case of RE this silence can promote inclusion, democratic experiences and understanding of the inner self (Lees, 2012, pp.105-6). This solitary, silent space should be created more in RE. I have tried to capture this sense of 'cloister' space in the following active contemplation (Figure 16).

### **Solitude and Silence: An active contemplation - The Cloisters of San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome**



I visited these cloisters in March 2016<sup>13</sup>. Here is my active contemplation on this space.

*There was a sense of tranquility and openness. I was struck by the incredibly intricate detail in the mosaic work. I pondered over the time and creativity that had gone into the construction of the space. Although walking the cloisters with others, often in silence, there was a sense of solitude yet closeness to those who had walked the paths before me. In this way, I felt a connection with the past. On one wall was a manuscript by Palestrina. Having sung Palestrina at school, I was reminded of my own experiences and learning. There was a sense of peace amidst the noise and bustle of Rome, and even compared to the Papal Basilica next door which was busy with tourists. In this place, there were few people, and for me the simplicity of the design and architecture, compared to other more elaborate churches, allowed me space to contemplate, pause and reflect.*

Figure 16: An active contemplation (Kathryn Wright, 2016)

#### **9.3.8 Collaborative Space**

As well as the space providing solitude, it should also provide collaboration. In some ways this is a paradox, however the notion of interconnectedness through silence helps to explain why both solitude and collaboration are important. Collaboration is deeply rooted in Benedictine principles (Verheyen, 1949, p.8). The whole concept of a monastic order is based on a community. Matters of importance were discussed through counsel (ibid., 1949, p.8) so that the voices of all could be heard. The Rule pays

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<sup>13</sup> The photographs included here were taken by myself.

particular attention to the validity of the young person's voice (ibid., 1949, p.8). Hospitality is rooted in relationship. If there is a host, there must be a guest. The host must host someone, or they are not a host. The biblical narratives and conceptual literature highlight the need for interconnectedness and relationship as exemplifying the true nature of hospitality.

In terms of RE, there is an interweaving of the teacher, pupil and subject. I am using the phrase 'fabric of community' to explain this. For me, this means that the teacher, as host, weaves their own story into the interactions of the classroom. In addition, pupils, like guests, are to be received within the purposeful and safe space, and tell their own stories. They are to be listened to and welcomed. There is a sense here that the teacher takes on a servant role - they serve their pupils. However, this is less about a servant-master relationship, rather a service-served relationship. It is about serving the world of the guest or pupil, that is, being open to their world, to accept them on their terms. This means that pupils can find their voice, and speak their minds, they can be affirmed but also challenged.

However, this collaborative space must have boundaries which are linked to the values and the purpose of the space. Boundaries allow effective dialogue to take place, and this mirrors Nouwen's (1998) balance between receptivity and confrontation as two sides of Christian witness. This balance serves teachers in Church schools well, as they grapple with the relationship between the ethos of the school and maintaining authentic academic RE. To see the RE within the receptivity of an inclusive space, but to allow critique and challenge of this space within the boundaries of the host provides a way forward.

This collaborative space should allow pupils to find their authentic voice, to be able to speak their mind, but also to be able to build a collective wisdom through listening. This is developed further when defining listening for wisdom.

### **9.3.9 Slow and Deep Space**

The space is to be a place where its meaning and purpose are considered carefully and where there is an opportunity for deep learning to take place.



This means a space for thinking, contemplation and reflection. This aspect was particularly important to the focus group, who felt that time for RE was of crucial importance, particularly in relation to listening for wisdom. To draw on the Rule of St. Benedict (Verheyen, 1949, p.64, 67) a guest is provided for and all their needs (spiritual or theological and physical) are met. In my own experience, when I set a table I make space for each person, I think about the meal to be provided, I think about who might sit by whom, I think about the needs of each person coming. This event is not rushed, but considered and reasoned. I take my time. Therefore, space takes time to create. In many ways, this is where the teacher embodies the principle as they live out through their own practice a 'slow' pedagogy. They reflect, reason, and consider carefully on a daily basis.

Preparing a table for Benedictines also has a sacramental meaning - the table represented the unknown yearning of every human heart for communion or fellowship with the 'something more' that infuses all that exists (Homan and Pratt, 2007, pp.110-111). Therefore, preparing a table for Benedictines was also about creating space for a human being, and human beings were regarded as sacred. In this situation, attention to detail became important, as each person was seen as a child of God. The space created was a place where there was an opportunity for people – as children of God – to encounter God. This implies a sense of deep and profound experience, as people engage with what it means to be human. In RE, therefore, opportunities can be provided for pupils to reflect deeply on and encounter theological ideas (Christian and other perspectives). In this sense, the space created is slow and deep. It is slow because the space is created with thought and consideration so that needs are met and all are valued, but it is also deep as thinking about self, God and others requires profound thought and reasoning. Thinking cannot be rushed.

I have now explained the first principle of pedagogy based on a theology of hospitality. To draw together the ideas contained in this principle, I undertake an active contemplation on the notion of an embrace (Figure 17). This aims to show how a visual representation conceived in my mind's eye can help understand this principle with all its complexities.

**Creating Space: An active contemplation on the concept of embrace**

*The open arms of an embrace capture this concept of space.*

*The openness of the arms imply purpose. There is a reason for the arms held open, they are wanting to be in relationship with someone else.*

*The openness of the arms imply safety. The arms are enfolding, they imply security and comfort. They can be firm, yet relaxed.*

*The openness of the arms imply values. The open arms may have many meanings. They may be trusting, compassionate, forgiving, loving, hopeful. They speak of values.*

*The openness of the arms imply openness of mind. The open arms are not full, they allow for new encounters, for new knowledge, for new ideas.*

*The openness of the arms imply inclusivity and affirmation. The open arms are open to all, and the circling of the arms imply affirmation and welcome.*

*The openness of the arms imply a sense of solitude. The open arms suggest you are alone, but want relationship.*

*The openness of the arms imply a desire for collaboration. The open arms suggest desire for others.*

*The openness of the arms imply above all that there is something more. The open arms suggest that there is a lack of contentedness with the current status quo. That there is more through encounter, that the space is open, purposeful and holds meaning within it.*

Figure 17: An active contemplation on embrace and creating space  
(Kathryn Wright, 2016)

**9.3.10 Implications of ‘creating space’ as a principle for pedagogy**

Creation of space is the first pedagogical principle. This creation of space will have implications for:

- the classroom environment and the physical learning space, e.g. arrangement of seating so that it facilitates the creation of space, the feeling of the room as a hospitable place.

- the preparation of the teaching and learning activities, e.g. setting the table/preparing the lesson, knowing the pupils and their needs, quality time spent on preparing learning, being aware of one's own values and purpose for religious education, taking a mindset of openness.
- the teaching and learning strategies used by the teacher, e.g. enquiry focused, collaborative approaches, openness to creativity, slowing down the learning, using silence effectively, mixing community and solitude.
- the design of the curriculum, e.g. depth of learning to take place, what is taught in order to encourage creation of space in the lives of pupils themselves, teaching less subject content to allow for more response and collaborative learning.

#### **9.4 Encountering Others**

The second principle is that of encountering others; within the Church of England school context this means primarily seeing Christ in and through others. As outlined in Chapter Six, the initial title for this principle was 'encountering Christ, through encountering others'. The aim behind this was to make specific connections with the mission of the Church and to make explicit the possibility of transformation through RE. In the initial stages I did not see this terminology as about faith formation. I regarded the term 'Encountering Christ' in the sense of dialogue with the Christian faith through enquiry into theological concepts. On reflection, this was naive because the term could be interpreted in many different ways. Whilst the majority of the teachers in the focus group wanted to retain the term 'Christ', its use was seen to be potentially problematic. Therefore, I have dropped the term 'Christ' because of inherent misunderstandings. Nevertheless, dropping the word 'Christ' does not mean that an encounter with Christ is not possible through RE, rather the emphasis has changed to ensure that the relationship between RE and the mission of the Church is not confused.

By setting the revised principle, 'Encountering others' within the mission of the Church, the possibility of encountering Christ remains possible. This was primarily the view of Teacher E in the focus group who felt that the term 'Christ' was not required because of the context of the RE being taught, i.e. in a Church school. The rooting of this principle within a

theology of hospitality and the analogy of an embrace allow this to be understood without the dangers of implying faith formation. The integrity of the academic subject of RE and the mission of the church are both upheld. The primary aim of RE, i.e. religious literacy, is coherently articulated within the mission of the Church through the hospitality metaphor and the aim of every child to have a life-enhancing encounter with Jesus Christ is maintained.

The removal of the words 'encountering Christ', also allows a greater emphasis to be placed on all types of faith and belief, stressing the importance of the encounter itself, including with those on the margins, minority faith or beliefs groups and the diversity within global religious traditions. This shift places more emphasis on 'coming alongside' through in-depth encounters and listening to others' stories whilst still maintaining the possibility of change, as an 'encounter' in itself implies some kind of experience with the other.

It should also be noted that 'encountering others' is something that not only takes place within an RE lesson. The teacher is 'encountering others', whether that be pupils, colleagues, members of faith and belief, all the time. Therefore, the sense of living out the pedagogical principles is evident through this principle although a teacher might not be conscious of this all the time.

Based on the biblical analysis (Chapter Four) and conceptual literature review (Chapter Five), I suggest that there are four characteristics of 'Encountering others'. These are:

- an open and transformative encounter.
- a humble encounter.
- an authentic encounter.
- a deep, theological encounter.

I will now take each these in turn showing how they are rooted in my analysis, and show how they can be shaped to specifically apply to RE in Church of England schools.

#### 9.4.1 Open and Transformative Encounter

The biblical analysis (Chapter Four) and conceptual literature (Chapter Five) review indicate that a theology of hospitality is characterised by open encounters. By this I mean that the door to discovery is unlocked, that one comes with an attitude of curiosity and expectancy to learn something new. This is rooted in both the expressions of hospitality found in the life of Jesus such as the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the encounter with Mary and Martha (Luke 9:10-17, Luke 10: 38-42) but also in the notion of true hospitality providing knowledge of God and insight into life (Proverbs 9:1-10). Drawing on the biblical and documentary analysis this means that the teacher puts themselves, and their pupils, in a vulnerable place. I am using the word vulnerable in a positive sense, to mean a place where risks are taken and there is an openness to change (Haswell, Haswell and Blalock, 2009). This links closely to the notion of being intellectually open, and creating space which has these features. This also relates to the idea of subversive space, where boundaries are pushed and where the host-teacher creates space where transformation can take place. Through an encounter, all are transformed and changed. This notion of transformative encounter is referred to in the most recent Church of England vision document (2016, p.4). The analysis of the Old Testament understanding indicated that hospitality was transformative, in the sense of an encounter with God's presence. In terms of RE, the subject is transformative in the way it enables pupils to wrestle with complex ideas about God. In addition, encounters with faith and belief communities, their people and practices, allow pupils (and teachers) to reflect on and consider their own perspectives.

There are pedagogical approaches outlined in Chapter One which already go some way to advocating this open encounter. One example would be the '*Gift to the Child*' (Hull, 2000) where children are encouraged to listen and ask questions about a component of religion before progressing to a more complex understanding. This non-judgemental approach is essential in an RE classroom; learning to wait and not making assumptions is part of the learning process. This is supported by Palmer's (2007) focus on honouring others and the teacher empathetically entering the pupils' world. By modelling this, the teacher enables the pupils to honour 'the other', whether that be an encounter with a person or engagement with

religion/belief through a story or artefact. As outlined previously, this takes place within the context of space which is safe and affirming, yet where positions can be challenged where appropriate.

Another example would be the interpretive approach where children become interpreters of religious meaning-making. The 'reflectivity' aspect of the pedagogical approach is about transformation or what Jackson terms 'edification' (Jackson, 2012, pp.192ff). This comes close to my understanding of an open and transformative encounter. Allowing text (in the broadest sense) to speak to pupils, to be open to possibilities and new ideas is at the heart of an enquiry-based approach to learning which is advocated by Ofsted (2013). The focus on hermeneutical enquiry and critical examination of truth in the interpretative approach sits well with this. However, for an enquiry to be truly open and transformative an understanding of hermeneutics along the lines of those used in this thesis would be preferable. Thiselton's (2009) analogy of a jigsaw referred to in Chapter Three is a useful way of explaining to teachers how an enquiry can be open and transformative. This may provide a way forward for teachers to apply the theoretical notion of open and transformative encounter into the classroom. The pieces of the jigsaw can be seen as a series of encounters which are interpreted and analysed. The relationship and connectivity of these encounters, or jigsaw pieces, is studied and reflected upon to build up a big picture. The big picture creates something new which in itself is transformative, as one engages with new found knowledge and understanding.

One of the weaknesses of the interpretive approach was its lack of transfer to the classroom. As this thesis is a largely theoretical piece, the focus group analysis on this aspect was crucial in terms of thinking through initial ideas about how an open and transformative encounter could be achieved in the classroom. The group explored this more specifically in terms of ethnographic approaches such as immersing oneself in the lived experience of religion and belief. In addition, in the late stages of my write-up I was involved in some small-scale research exploring the use of

Contact Theory<sup>14</sup> in RE (National Association of Teachers of RE, 2017). I was invited to take part in this research specifically because of the potential links with this thesis. The use of Contact Theory may provide one way of transferring the principle of open and transformative encounter into classroom practice.

#### **9.4.2 Humble Encounter**

As highlighted in the conceptual literature (Chapter Five) there is a danger that western culture and to some extent western Christian traditions have set themselves up in a place of superiority. Cultivating humility means stepping down from this place of superiority or 'pedestal' and allowing other cultures, traditions and beliefs to teach us. This means acknowledging the lens through which we engage in encounter, and accepting that there are many other perspectives on the world which can provide meaning and purpose. Jesus acts as the humble host as illustrated through the account of him washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), where he takes the role of a servant.

Humility means that we should make an attempt to learn about the cultural norms of others (Smith, 2009, pp.59ff). This means taking an approach in RE which is rooted in developing genuine understanding of others. The biblical narratives in particular suggest that love or agape (sacrificial love) should underpin ones encounters with others. In RE, this love is expressed primarily through an understanding of others. Some of the interpretative approaches are again helpful here in terms of their ethnographic and empathetic techniques, but I would stress here that acknowledging one's own lens is vital before one begins an encounter. If one does not acknowledge one's own lens, then we are in danger of not being truly humble and may approach a text, artefact, person or other component of religion from a superior position.

This humble approach allows the host to become guest and the guest to come host. The teacher can become learner and the learner the teacher. Where humility is present, opportunities for community are heightened and

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<sup>14</sup> The Contact Theory hypothesis is that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between people.

those on the margins are given a voice (Russell, 1993 cited in Brady, 2008, p.8). In addition, when a humble attitude is taken there is no expectation of reciprocity and therefore there is an opportunity to provide unconditional hospitality (Bretherton, 2006).

### **9.4.3 Authentic Encounter**

This aspect of the encounter is the most crucial element, and lies at the heart of my pedagogical principles. The concept of authenticity is paramount in both the biblical analysis (Chapter Four) and conceptual literature (Chapter Five), particularly in the work of Sutherland (2006) and Smith (2009). Enabling authentic encounter to take place means being a true host. This is noted in particular in Jesus' encounters with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the woman who wipes his feet (Luke 7:36-39). In both these examples Jesus subverts the boundaries of the day to engage with the reality, or authenticity, of the daily life of people. In these examples Jesus enables a deep connection to occur which is transformational in nature. A deep connection with and understanding of members of different faith and belief traditions lie at the heart of what I call an authentic encounter. Drawing on the theology of hospitality I explore how the concept of authenticity may be perceived in four ways.

Firstly, authenticity means knowing the subject matter (i.e. the food on the table). This means that preparation has gone into knowing about the subject matter, it is understood in terms of what it brings and offers to the pupils as guests. This means that there is a genuine need for teachers to engage with their own subject knowledge of religion and belief. They need to be able to understand what they are teaching, in order to be able to offer it authentically and accurately to their pupils. The importance of teacher subject knowledge has been highlighted by the Teacher Development Trust in their report *Developing Great Teaching* (2015).

Secondly, it means that the subject matter itself is authentic, or to use a cooking analogy there must not be synthetic substitutes. This argument seeks to refute the notion that a phenomenological approach based on the work of Smart (1968) is the most effective way of teaching RE. Smart's focus on religion as function based on his dimensions of religion means that religions are frequently seen as constructs or fitting into categories. This means that agreed syllabuses compartmentalise dimensions of



religion into areas of study which are often false constructs (e.g. Norfolk Agreed Syllabus, 2012). This means that the RE offered to pupils does not reflect the authentic nature of religion and belief in the world today, nor the experience of many religious and non-religious believers. This point has been highlighted by a number of reports in recent years such as *A New Settlement?* (Clarke and Woodhead, 2015) *REforReal* (Dinham and Shaw, 2015), and *Living with Difference* (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015).

Thirdly, a true, authentic or real encounter will mean that students are asking respectful questions of others which means they are willing to learn from and with others, as well as about others. Good questions are rooted in prior learning, so they build on what pupils already know - about themselves and others. Good questions are aware of the historical context and the complexity of situations. An authentic encounter with a member of faith or text (written, verbal, visual, audio) will be rooted in an understanding of the meta-narrative(s) of that faith or belief tradition. The questions which arise as part of this encounter will therefore be appropriate, searching and sincere. They will be true and real, showing that the pupils really want to hear a genuine answer. They will want to engage, to learn and understand what it means to be a believer in the particular tradition being explored. Empathy becomes an important part of the authentic encounter. In this sense, the pupil moves from being a tourist, which in many ways is akin to the phenomenological approach, to instead 'coming alongside' someone (Smith, 2009, p.86), which is rooted in hospitality and authentic, real encounter. As highlighted previously, coming alongside reflects the way in which Jesus came alongside the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34). On this occasion the two disciples are hosts who become guests, whereas Jesus changes from guest to host. This mirrors the idea of moving from 'looking from the outside' at religious belief and practice to 'being on the other side of the window'. The notion of host and guest become blurred, as a true authentic encounter is achieved.

The true encounter therefore focuses on effective questioning rooted in an understanding of the meta-narrative(s) of particular religions and beliefs. Unless a systematic understanding of religion and belief takes place, then the questions that students develop will be inappropriate and shallow at best, and at worst offensive. A resource launched in 2016 entitled

*Understanding Christianity* (Pett, 2016) aims to try and achieve this in terms of helping pupils understand one of the meta-narratives of Christianity, namely the salvation narrative. My assertion is that a balance between more ethnographic approaches, such as that advocated by Jackson (1997), and an approach focusing on an in-depth understanding of religious belief and practice, is required. This will enable a more ethnographic approach to be informed by knowledge and understanding and for authentic encounters to take place.

Lastly, an authentic encounter means the teacher knows themselves, as well as the pupils (guests) and prepares well for them. This means the teacher should be aware of their own assumptions and prejudices, as well as their own beliefs and views before a topic begins. Here I draw particularly on the work of McAvoy (1998) and Gallagher (2007) in terms of the teacher making room for the pupils' thoughts and ideas, and enabling 'intellectual hospitality' to occur. Creating a community of learners together allows all members to come as they are, and be real in the classroom situation. In many ways, it also means the teacher helps the pupils to become true hosts. It is about modelling the authentic encounter, so that pupils can move from being guests to hosts. Here, the ontological nature of the authentic encounter is stressed as this element is primarily about the teacher 'being' authentic with his/her pupils, and supporting their pupils in being the same.

#### **9.4.4 Deep, Theological Encounter**

If encounters are to be authentic then they must be rooted in a true and accurate understanding of religion and belief. The biblical analysis (Chapter Four) showed that through hospitality theological concepts were explored and expressed. This was particularly highlighted in relation to the narratives in Luke's and John's gospels. This means that priority should be given to understanding what it means to be a member of a faith or belief community, to understand the foundations on which practices are based. As Ofsted reported ten years ago, time should be spent helping young people to make sense of the world of religion and belief (Ofsted, 2007). This requires moving beyond a superficial learning about belief traditions, to a deep, theological approach to the study of religion. This develops further the concept of moving beyond being a tourist, to 'walking alongside' (Smith,

2009). Hospitality is about truly understanding the guest. When a guest is invited it is with an invitation to know the person better, to bring them into one's own home or setting so that you can spend time finding out about them, talking together, deepening a relationship. In RE, this means being an effective host of the subject matter. It means being an effective host of the people of faith and belief, their practices and lifestyles; they are the guests. In this instance both the teacher and the pupil are hosts.

Smith (2009) highlights language skills as being particularly important in his Modern Foreign Language context, so that greater understanding of others is achieved. Within RE this suggests time must be spent in developing an understanding of theological language with children. This should include the way language is used, and the limitations of language to convey some beliefs and meanings, and the value and importance of symbolism. Without this, an authentic encounter cannot occur because we will make presumptions and fill the space with our own preconceptions.

My literature review shows that learning about religion and belief frequently remains superficial (Ofsted, 2013; Church of England, 2014). It is frequently purely about knowledge-acquisition or in some cases it is just about becoming familiar with some aspects of belief and practice. It is not about engaging with the nature of religious language, nor is it about understanding the complexity of religion and belief in the contemporary world, nor is it about the impact that religion and belief can have on both individuals and society. These latter aims are primarily what it means to be religiously literate in the modern world (Church of England, 2011, 2016). If authentic encounters are to occur, then students must be equipped to be religiously and, I argue here, theologically literate, so that they can ask the right questions. Authentic encounters are rooted in knowledge and understanding which is more than 'learning about', it is about deep encounter with truths and religious practices. This deep encounter can only occur when pupils grapple with the complex nature of religion and belief itself, and explore the theology which underpins the narratives (Chipperton et al., 2016). Moulin (2015) makes a similar point in an online article about the importance of theological education. Here he advocates scriptural reasoning as one effective strategy to promoting good theological conversation in the RE classroom.

I have already shown in Chapters Four and Five there is a tendency to interpret religious traditions through one's own cultural conditions and what we think we already know. This is one of the main reasons why there are weaknesses with the constructivist approach (Erricker, 2000, 2010), because whilst there is a positive focus on pupils' own ability to make meaning it champions process over subject knowledge. Therefore, real or true understanding of what faith and belief mean to the actual believer is limited. Therefore, an enquiry approach which brings together both an opportunity to make meaning and at the same time enables an authentic, deep theological encounter to take place is what is required. This is why I am advocating both 'encountering others' and 'listening for wisdom' as two of my principles.

I have now explained the second principle of pedagogy based on a theology of hospitality. I now show how the analogy of an embrace, can provide clarity and a further depth of understanding of 'encountering others' through an active contemplation (Figure 18).

**Encountering others: An active contemplation on the concept of embrace**

*The open arms imply openness to the other. The arms are receptive towards others, they imply a sense encountering another person for who they are, not with assumptions.*

*The open arms imply humility. The arms show that I need someone else, I want to learn from them to embrace them for who they are. To see Christ in them even if they are different from me in every way, they are a child of God.*

*The open arms imply authenticity. I come ready to listen and engage. I come open to learn and wanting to learn from the other. It also implies respect for the other person's space, they can embrace as closely as they want to without being swamped. Each remains distinct in the embrace, but are changed through the connection.*

*The open arms imply more than a shaking of hands. An embrace implies that I want to learn from this person, that I am accepting them into my space. That I want to encounter them as a person, a fellow human being, and that the encounter may change me (and them) in some way afterwards. The open arms of the embrace imply a sense of depth, moving beyond the superficial.*

Figure 18: An active contemplation on embrace and encountering others  
(Kathryn Wright, 2016)

**9.4.5 Implications of 'encountering others' as a principle for pedagogy**

Encountering others is the second pedagogical principle. This notion of encounter will have implications for:

- the classroom environment and the physical learning space, e.g. how the room is set up to foster positive encounters, how seats are arranged, how display space is used, e.g. exploring language and symbolism.
- the preparation of the teaching and learning activities, e.g. teachers spending time with members of faith communities, ensuring their own subject knowledge is secure and accurate, researching authentic encounters, developing appropriate questioning, being aware of their own bias and lens through which their teaching is approached.

- the teaching and learning strategies used by the teacher, e.g. a focus on hermeneutical enquiry, real-life encounter with members of faith and belief that involves dialogue and questioning, opportunities for pupils to grapple with theological concepts and ideas, opportunities for the encounters to be transformative.
- the design of the curriculum, e.g. depth of learning to take place, space in the curriculum for real-life encounter and also with theological ideas, space for in-depth enquiry into theological ideas but balanced by ethnographic and anthropological approaches to ensure authentic encounter.

## **9.5 Listening for wisdom**

The third of the three pedagogical principles I have identified is listening for wisdom. This is primarily about the importance of story and narrative. This links closely with the previous principle and the focus on authentic and deep encounter.

I have explained how creating space in RE must involve a purpose. The space created is purposeful. Secondly, I have shown that encountering others involves authenticity, humility and depth. Listening for wisdom brings together these two ideas and is rooted particularly in the Rule of St. Benedict (Verheyen, 1949), Homan and Pratt (2007) and Ross (2008). Listening lies at the heart of the Benedictine Rule. The listening in this tradition is both individual and communal; listening with others supports the community, promoting openness and humility. Listening for wisdom builds on the gospel narratives where Jesus listens and interacts with others (e.g. Luke 10:1-10, Luke 10: 38-42), and shares his presence with them.

### **9.5.1 Why wisdom?**

Listening for wisdom is more than and different from academic knowledge or objectivism. Palmer (2007) expresses concern that too often every question is turned into an objective problem to be solved, rather than it being about spirit and soul (2007, p.20). Palmer uses the word 'truth' to describe what I call wisdom (1993, pp.25ff). For Palmer, learning requires response and relationship. For me, this is about both the teacher and the pupil becoming wiser. As noted earlier, the root of the word 'educate'

means to lead out (Oxford English Dictionary, 1990). Education involves action and a change in the one being educated.

Palmer's concern is that objectivism makes 'things' of everything, and things can quickly be used for political, social and economic gain (1993, p.51). Therefore, if knowledge is seen as about things, then education in its truest sense does not occur. Based on my analysis of conceptual literature, I believe this focus on objectivity has occurred within the RE community. Religion and belief learning have become an object that different stakeholders are seeking to control because they see knowledge in terms of objectivity. This is also referred to in an article by Brine (2016). So, to take a different epistemological view of religion and belief, where real or true knowledge is understood as wisdom, provides a way forward. This may appear to run counter to recent theories of education as knowledge acquisition (for example, Hirsh, 2016), however I do not believe that the two are mutually exclusive.

I have cited listening for wisdom specifically, because wisdom implies more than objective knowledge. I prefer the term wisdom to truth because I think in the RE community, the word 'truth' can be misunderstood or has unhelpful connotations. For example, sometimes it is associated with absolute truth or infallibility. Wisdom is about having good judgement and using experience (Oxford English Dictionary, 1990). Although having its root in an Old English word meaning 'to know' there is a sense that it is related to how one acts, and not exclusively about knowledge. The importance of sources of wisdom is referred to in the *Review of Religious Education* (REC, 2013) where reference is made to their importance in terms of what pupils are to learn about. In this thesis, sources of wisdom are seen not only in terms of what pupils will know about them, but how they may develop pupils' own wisdom. The notion of wisdom is at the heart of the *Church of England Vision for Education* (Church of England, 2016). Wisdom in this document is seen in terms of interaction between people, societies and civilisations (2016, p.11), as well as in terms of seeking understanding in relation to all aspects of reality (2016, p.13). Listening for wisdom should therefore enable new discoveries to be made and transformation to take place.

Listening for wisdom is also ontological in nature, in the sense that it is

about **becoming** wise. At the heart of any RE there lies a tension between the academic aims of the subject and the personal or affective aspects which are implied within it. This is reflected in statements about RE including that in the *Non-Statutory National Framework for RE* (REC, 2013, pp.14-15). Here the three aims of RE reflect the knowledge and understanding to be taught as well as the opportunity of pupils to express ideas and insights about religion and belief. As a key pedagogical principle, listening for wisdom balances a systematic study of religion and belief that is essential through encounters with others, with the importance of gaining insight and understanding. Teachers and pupils will, as a result, live out the wisdom found in their daily lives, in their ongoing encounters with others. This is a continual 'living out' that spans a lifetime.

### **9.5.2 Listening for wisdom through narrative**

Listening is key to relationship; listening to people and the stories that shape individuals and communities. In our current global climate, there is increased importance in terms of understanding what shapes lives. In Chapter Four I highlighted the importance of listening in the life of Jesus; for example, in listening to Zacchaeus (Luke 10:1-10) and to the two travellers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34). In the narrative account of Mary and Martha, Mary demonstrates the nature of a true host through her ability to listen (Luke 10: 38-42). Listening for wisdom through narrative has many facets. For example, it can mean listening to the narrative of the teacher themselves and what they bring to the classroom, it can mean listening to the narrative of the pupil(s), and also listening to the narratives of religions and beliefs themselves.

As already highlighted, Palmer (2007) discusses the importance of the good teacher weaving their own identity with the subject they are teaching and the students; a fabric of community is created. I argue here that narrative and story are key elements of this weaving process. Story and narrative connect the pupil with the subject matter. Pupils, and teachers, bring their own narrative to the classroom context. There is room for stories of personal experience, as well as a place for the narratives of religion and beliefs, as well as universal stories. Many of these universal stories or narratives enable us to understand our own stories better because we reflect them back on ourselves. A good teacher is therefore one who



listens and creates space for stories to be heard and weaves them into the learning. It means empathetically entering into the pupil's world. It means being an effective host. A good host will invite the guests to share their stories, she will engage them in conversation. Yet, the host is potentially moved and shaped by the guest. The teacher, through listening, also seeks wisdom alongside their pupils and is also shaped by the stories they hear. The ontological nature of this principle is very strong; in many ways it will not be effective unless it is truly lived out.

The primary focus on objectivism and the historical focus on the study of phenomenon in religion (Smart, 1968; Palmer, 1993, 2007) have meant the object of learning is disconnected from both the teacher and the pupil. This means that, as Smith (2009) claims, the pupil sees the object of learning like a 'tourist', creating a distorted view which does not support authenticity or the lived reality of religion and belief. However, to treat the religious and belief material as a subject means that we allow it to act and speak to us. We listen. It is not purely an object to be 'acted upon' but has a voice of its own. It can also be argued that no religious material can be explored as an object, and that being 'objective' about objects is impossible within RE because there is always a potential connection between the learner and the 'object' in question. This is because of the nature of religion and belief and its connection with human experience. This would imply that objectivism is impossible since there is always a connection between the object and the learner. If the object becomes instead a subject in RE it means that the subject can speak for itself in an authentic way, in a real sense, and that the learner can interact with it and allow their own narrative to connect with it. Thus, the narrative of the religion or belief in question and the narrative of the learner interact with one another. It is in this listening space, I argue, that wisdom can be found.

Therefore, my assertion is that the object of learning should be viewed as the subject, not an object. That as a subject it connects with both the teacher and the pupil, and that narrative is fundamental in understanding this principle in RE. When the subject of religion is treated as narrative it allows connection, interaction and engagement both cognitively and personally. This means that understanding in RE is likely to be hermeneutical in nature.

The subject at the heart of RE includes the narratives of world religions and beliefs, as well as the personal narratives of the children and young people in the classroom. Within Church of England schools the grand narratives of Christianity have a significant place within the curriculum. The *Understanding Christianity* resource (Pett, 2016) takes the grand narrative of the bible as salvation story. Its conceptual framework is based on the exploration of the biblical narrative, understanding the impact of this and making connections with pupils themselves and others through their learning. Engagement with the narrative of the sacred text, the narrative of the church and the narrative of Christian living provides a way forward for engaging with religion as a subject. My thesis supports the use of this approach as long as space is provided for pupils to actively listen for wisdom themselves, and that other ways of understanding Christianity as a global and diverse faith are also explored.

### **9.5.3 Listening for wisdom through enquiry into theological concepts**

Following on from the focus on narrative, there is a distinct element within this that is particularly important in Church of England schools. My biblical analysis (Chapter Four), and in particular the work of Smith (2009) and Chester (2011) reviewed in Chapter Five, indicate that listening for wisdom is about not only our own and other people's narratives, but also the Divine. The biblical narratives stress the relationship between hospitality and meeting with God (e.g. Genesis 18:1-15, Exodus 24). The importance of theological engagement within RE is therefore an important element of this third principle.

The Old Testament analysis suggested that hospitality enabled God's presence to be sensed and that there was an opportunity for emotional and spiritual transformation through this encounter. There is a strong indication through both Testaments that hospitality is more than providing a meal; it is about meeting deep needs on multiple levels. Jesus uses meals to impart what Christians would term 'theological truths' to his followers. For example, he chooses a meal, the Last Supper (Luke 22), to convey to his disciples the theology of reconciliation and the new covenant. It is through meals that Jesus explores with his disciples the notion of the Kingdom of God. As Chester (2001) suggests concepts such as grace, hope and salvation are articulated through the notion of feasting (e.g. Luke 7:36-39).

Meals therefore do not just provide for the physical, but also the spiritual and theological. The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34) is another example of this, where not only does a theological exposition take place of the Old Testament, but also new insights are shed on it through the breaking of bread and the disciples' realisation that they have met with the risen Christ. In this moment, a new theology of resurrection is born. The importance of the theological as part of a Christian understanding of hospitality is indisputable. Furthermore, the conceptual literature (Chapter Five) supports this assertion. Smith (2009) demonstrates clearly the importance of not just knowing about the culture of others, but also gaining a true understanding of it through full engagement. *REforReal* (Dinham and Shaw, 2015) highlighted the need for knowledge and understanding of others and moving away from religions and beliefs as being 'exotic' (2015, p.4).

Therefore, any principles for pedagogy based upon hospitality must include an opportunity for pupils to encounter the theological. There are a number of ways in which this theological encounter may take place. Within the creation of space, the sacred texts can be open to interpretation, discussion, analysis and critique as well as contemplation and mediation. There should be space and time for quiet. Enquiry into theological concepts does not need to be busy and noisy. It should allow biblical material to speak and suggest its own meaning. Often silence should be valued in order to achieve this. As highlighted above, silence encourages open space; space where new ideas can be heard, be tested and discussed. Lectio Divina (Order of Carmelites, 2017) is a form of sacred reading done at a slow, meditative pace. It is used particularly in monastic orders such as the Carmelites. There is a process of reading, reflection, response and rest. The final stage of 'rest' is primarily about listening and being intellectually and spiritually open to change. This final stage is often followed up by sharing in community so that members of the group can learn from one another. The practice of Lectio Divina is perfectly possible within the context of an RE lesson as long as it is approached within the pedagogical framework set out here. The use of active contemplation in this thesis uses a similar process, and could be viewed as another practical outworking of listening for wisdom.

In light of Smith's (2009) understanding, theological enquiry will also involve the dialogic. Dialogue and what I will call 'immersion' into the culture or

religion are essential for enabling authentic listening to occur. My focus group stressed the importance of understanding a religion 'from within'. Pupils should therefore be encouraged to experience religion and belief practice, without becoming part of it. This means that the theological may take a more ethnographic approach and allow the pupils to dialogue with members of faith and belief, but also to experience encounters with faith and belief practice at first hand in order to truly understand the world in which they live. The pupils enter into the world of the religion and belief being studied, but do not become part of it. They move beyond the 'tourist' model, and also beyond the analogy of 'looking through the window'. Instead, they 'go through the window' and walk alongside the other and engage in dialogue. Dialogue takes place about the ultimate questions of life, belief and faith. Palmer (1993, p.62) explores the word 'interview', showing how it is made up of two words 'inter' and 'view'. An interview should open up the internal world of the person being 'viewed'; it is an 'internal view'. To understand this internal world the theological underpinning of beliefs and practices needs to be explored as they go to the heart of beliefs. For this to occur authentically, dialogue and conversation are essential.

I have written previously with others about the nature of the theological (Chipperton et al., 2016) and its importance in promoting religious literacy. I argue that theological literacy is an essential and distinctive element of religious literacy which is concerned with an understanding of and critical engagement with the big concepts upon which religions are founded, such as God (2016:2, p.8). In this paper, my colleagues and I put forward an understanding of the theological based on the work of McGrath (2011), highlighting the importance of the foundations of ideas about God, the development of the ways in which ideas about God have emerged and changed over time, the ways in which ideas about God relate to each other, and the ways in which ideas about God have applied in everyday living (McGrath, 2011, pp.101-102). Listening for wisdom by enquiring into theological concepts would occur through a range of teaching and learning approaches (Chipperton et al., 2016: 2, p.12) but would tend towards those that favour interpretation, critical thinking and dialogue. In light of this a hermeneutical approach to enquiry is preferred, as it encourages depth of reading of text and interpretation of narrative. This is an approach to

theological enquiry taken by *Understanding Christianity* (Pett, 2016). In this case the bible's meta-narrative of salvation history is explored through core theological concepts developed through a spiral curriculum. It is also an approach advocated by Bowie (2016) for the RE classroom. He promotes a hermeneutical RE which takes a 'critical edge' when interpreting texts (Bowie, 2016, p.62) and allows the teacher and pupil to 'become active interpreters of the mystery' (ibid., p.62). This would seem to be an effective way of putting this principle of listening for wisdom into practice.

#### **9.5.4 Listening for wisdom through relationship**

The teacher is to listen for the wisdom in and through their students, as well as creating the space for students to listen to each other. The teacher is host who creates a community of learning. The importance of community is central in the theology of hospitality. Hospitality is an expression of love for God and neighbour. Pohl (2009) stresses this point in terms of the early church providing households of welcome and community provision. In Chapter Four I showed that Jesus' relationships with others was often subversive and inclusive. He is frequently concerned with both physical and emotional/spiritual needs (e.g. Matthew 14:13-21). Table fellowship was a sign of the new Kingdom of God that he claimed to usher in, and was transformational in nature. The importance of breaking bread together in the early church (Acts 2 and 20) illustrates the central role of meeting together and the notion that in community God's presence is felt. The implication here is that a pedagogy based on listening for wisdom through relationships/community is potentially transformational.

True hospitality enables both people in the relationship to change. The RE classroom, if underpinned by the principle of listening for wisdom through relationships, can be, I argue, transformational because it can bring about change in attitudes, values and beliefs. However, this transformation can only take place if interaction occurs, if teachers and pupils actually allow themselves to listen to the other person (e.g. a member of a faith tradition, a voice in a 'text', a fellow pupil) and accept that their own reality might change as a result.

This collective approach to learning and the importance of communal interaction is central to my principles. It confirms that the notion of 'learning about religion' in RE is misguided as it makes religion and belief into

objects to be viewed 'from the outside'. Instead, we are to be 'in community' with what we are learning, which includes the subject, the teacher and the pupil voices (Palmer, 2007). This supports a hermeneutical approach which continually leads to new interpretations through a communal process. This helps to resolve the issues raised in Chapter Two about how the subject matter of RE is viewed and understood in a Church school context. It reflects, too, the work of York (2002) who speaks of hospitality as giving oneself to others. Here the teacher and students give themselves - in an intellectual and emotional sense - to one another and collectively seek wisdom.

The relationship between the teacher and the student is one where the teacher is the host and the students are the guests. However, these are also interchangeable. The teacher's role is primarily to enable the students to engage with the text or subject, by encouraging them to reflect and by being a supportive presence. This mirrors the account of Abraham and the three visitors (Genesis 18: 1-15) where Abraham regards them as honoured guests. However, through the communal interaction there is also a sense that the host becomes guest and the guests become hosts. The Abrahamic account also demonstrates this, as God speaks to Abraham through his guests and yet it is Abraham as host who is transformed through the encounter. If collective wisdom is sought, then there will be an interplay between the teacher and pupil (and the subject matter). The teacher and the pupil in particular offer intellectual hospitality; an openness to and welcoming of new knowledge and understanding. This will be complex and ever-changing. This provides an opportunity for the RE classroom to reflect the complex interplay of host-guest in the biblical narratives, for example those in the New Testament highlighted in the Gospel of Luke.

The biblical narratives also stress the inclusive nature of hospitality. This should also be reflected in the relationships that one listens to in order to gain wisdom. There is a strong case, based on the theology of hospitality, that in RE one should listen to those on the margins; to have a wide-angle lens on relationships encountered. Within RE this might include the voices of minority religious groups, those who are persecuted or are victims of injustice. In a sense, within RE, all are to have a voice and all should be listened to. This is also consistent with Bretherton's (2006) view that

schools must move beyond tolerance to a more profound understanding of others through listening. Too often in RE a narrow diet of religion and belief is studied (Church of England, 2014). The argument here is that some of the best learning may happen through listening to a wide range of sometimes conflicting and controversial or alternative perspectives. It is in this communal space of listening for wisdom that risks are taken and RE can sometimes become subversive.

I have now explained the third principle of pedagogy based on a theology of hospitality. The analogy of an embrace captures the heart of what it means to listen for wisdom as I illustrate here through an active contemplation (Figure 19).

**Listening for Wisdom: An active contemplation on the concept of embrace**

*The open arms imply a search for something beyond oneself. A search for wisdom in and through others. It implies that I need others, that I need to listen and learn beyond myself.*

*The open arms imply true enquiry, a sense of wanting to learn about the other in a genuine way. The focus is on the other person and what they bring; what they want to share with you. You are there to learn, to allow them to speak to you, as you actively listen.*

*The open arms imply an interconnectedness between two people. They are in a relationship. The embrace overcomes fear and offers welcome. There is a sense of accepting the other, appreciating and affirming them.*

Figure 19: An active contemplation on embrace and listening for wisdom  
(Kathryn Wright, 2016)

### **9.5.5 Implications of 'listening for wisdom' as a principle for pedagogy**

Listening for wisdom is the third pedagogical principle. This notion of listening for wisdom will have implications for:

- the classroom environment and the physical learning space, e.g. how space is created for relationships to be fostered and for listening to be prioritized.
- the preparation of the teaching and learning activities, e.g. placing

importance on building relationships with pupils, fellow teachers and faith/belief communities, ensuring that resources used allow pupils to listen for wisdom, not over-preparing so that learning is open and listening can genuinely occur.

- the teaching and learning strategies used by the teacher, e.g. a focus on dialogic talk, using approaches which support an understanding of narratives - both personal and universal, pupils teaching one another, the 'subject' being at the heart of the learning, community/communal learning approaches being used such as Philosophy for Children (P4C), enquiry-focused.
- the design of the curriculum, e.g. allowing space for listening, a focus on narrative and the theological, as well as engagement with members of faith/belief communities and questions of meaning and purpose.

## **9.6 Limitations of my pedagogical principles**

I have now explained in detail the three principles for pedagogy based on a theology of hospitality. In this section I expound some of the limitations of my proposition. I consider issues of transferability, implementation and links with other pedagogical approaches.

### **9.6.1 Issues relating to transferability**

My principles for pedagogy are based primarily in theology. They were designed in a pragmatic way to address a particular problem in Church of England schools. I am aware, therefore, that from Grimmer's (2000) point of view they would not be regarded as 'principles' as they are not generic, but are specific to RE in a particular context. However, the creation of generic principles was never the intention of this research. The aim was to apply theology to a particular issue arising within RE in Church schools. In addition, I would argue that in some ways there is a false distinction between principles and procedures in the work of Grimmer (2000) as my principles imply procedures by their very nature. For example, my principles of creating space, encountering others and listening for wisdom lead to particular procedures such as relational activities like group work, or the use of narrative and story.

Nevertheless, the focus group suggested the principles might be



transferable to other subjects and potentially to other settings, e.g. community schools. However, the scope of this research did not allow for exploration of these themes and generalisations cannot be made. I acknowledge here that the principles could be transferable and are not necessarily unique to RE. Yet, in this research I have shown that the principles have a crucial function in understanding RE in Church schools. If they can be applied more widely, then I would see this as a positive outcome.

I am aware that I have presented a particular understanding of Christian hospitality which is shaped by my own worldview. My research has shown me the complex nature of hospitality and that even within Christianity there are many different interpretations (e.g Smith, 2009; Homan and Pratt, 2007; Ross, 2008; York, 2002; Pohl, 1999; Nouwen, 1998). My specific understanding of hospitality may therefore limit the scope of my pedagogical framework. It was specifically designed to be applied in Church of England schools, and within RE, so this is not an issue of concern to me as a researcher in terms of the outcome, but it is none the less important to acknowledge. Whilst I am not advocating a Christian pedagogy, I am aware that the specific understanding of hospitality I have taken may not be transferable to different faith and belief traditions.

### **9.6.2 Issues relating to implementation**

The first principle, 'creating space', has connections with other research taking place within my field of education. In particular my involvement as a teacher-adviser in residence for an ESRC Impact Acceleration project on the application of Contact Theory to RE has allowed me to make connections between theological and psychological approaches to space (National Association of Teachers of RE, 2017). This research may provide further practical ways forward for implementing my understanding of an open and transformative space. At the time of writing, applications for further funding to develop the small-scale project are being considered.

The second and third principles are reliant on an accurate representation of religion. This has implications in terms of resourcing and teacher subject knowledge. In order for the principles to be implemented effectively, these two issues will need to be addressed. This again may limit the application of the principles and the potential scope for impact as it is reliant on

continuing professional development for teachers.

The issue of the context of the teacher and the implementation of the principles remains. This issue, however, is not just limited to my own research, but to all potential approaches to teaching and learning in RE. The teacher will bring their own worldview, their background and school context to their pedagogical approach. I am therefore aware that my principles may be interpreted (and misinterpreted). This means that when sharing them with a wider audience they will need to be explained with clarity. It is for this reason that the analogy of an embrace is particularly helpful. I develop this notion further in Chapter Ten as part of my conclusions.

### **9.6.3 Issues relating to other pedagogical approaches**

I am aware that my principles have similarities with the work of Cooling (1994) and Jackson (1997, 2004, 2006). However, I suggest firstly that my principles are more inclusive than those of Cooling (1994, 2013). The principles can be used to explore any religion or worldview, they are not designed specifically for a study of Christianity. In addition, unlike the '*What if Learning?*' project, I am not advocating the approach as a 'Christian pedagogy' (Cooling, 2013). It is not about teaching in a Christian way, rather, it is about teaching RE in such a way that it sits within the mission of the Church of England and has its roots in Christian theology, in this case the theology of hospitality. This ensures, as the focus group asserted, that the principles are inclusive and can be used by all teachers in their Church school contexts.

Secondly, unlike Jackson (1997), my principles are rooted in theology, not anthropology. Whilst my principle of listening for wisdom is similar to Jackson's edification, I have framed this differently and hope that it is more practical in terms of potential teaching and learning strategies for the average teacher. The focus group study gives weight to potential strategies arising from the principles as teachers could see possibilities for application to their own classrooms.

## **9.7 Conclusions**

Based on a Christian theology of hospitality, I have created a pedagogical

framework for RE in Church of England schools. This is rooted in the following three principles:

- **Creating space:** This is a purposeful, safe and subversive space and is essential for the other two principles to be applied. In order to achieve this the space must be shaped by values, be intellectually open, inclusive and affirming. The space should allow for solitude and silence as well as collaboration. The space should not be concerned with time limits, but be slow and deep.
- **Encountering others:** This is characterised by the notion of encounters being open and transformative. In order to achieve this the encounters should be humble and authentic, rooted in reality. For them to be effective, the encounters are required to enable deep, theological engagement to take place.
- **Listening for wisdom:** This brings the two other principles together by providing the purpose for the space and means of encounter. Listening for wisdom takes place through narrative and engagement with story, through enquiry into theological concepts and through relationships.

## **Chapter 10. Embracing the moment: A new way of understanding religious education in Church of England schools**

### **Introduction**

In my conclusions I will summarise how I have answered my two research questions and consider the contribution of my thesis to an understanding of RE in Church of England schools. I put forward the idea that it is time to embrace a new understanding of religious education in Church of England schools which better meets the needs of a rapidly changing society. Lastly, I reflect on the implications of my research for shaping and transforming my own practice as an RE adviser, and how this approach might be shared with other advisers.

### **10.1 The central questions addressed by this thesis and reflections on the research process**

I set out with two research questions:

- Can a theology of hospitality help us to understand the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools?
- In light of this understanding, can a theology of hospitality provide principles of pedagogy for RE in Church of England schools?

I have shown how understanding the mission of the Church of England in terms of hospitality can help schools understand the purpose and place of RE in Church of England schools in today's context. In addition, I have used the analogy of an embrace to help teachers visualise the relationship between the mission of the Church of England in its schools and RE. I used a theology of hospitality to develop a theoretical framework for pedagogy in Church of England schools. This framework consists of three principles: creating space, encountering others and listening for wisdom. I used the analogy of an embrace to help teachers understand what is meant by each of these principles in a visual way. The principles provide a theoretical framework for pedagogy for RE in Church of England schools, which has the potential to transform the Church of England's understanding of RE in its schools.

As I explained in my introduction, seven years is a long time in the

education world in general. In the last couple of years, the momentum and call for change within RE have been particularly pronounced, culminating in the setting up of *The Commission on RE* (2016). As someone who works within the field of RE on a daily basis, particularly in a Church of England context, it is impossible to divorce myself from these debates and developments. During my research process, papers have been published highlighting the issues about the purpose of RE and raising questions about pedagogical approaches (for example, Ofsted, 2013; *Making a Difference?* 2014; REforReal, 2015). This has been of benefit, in terms of the importance of my research for the wider audience, but also a significant challenge. It has been difficult as a part-time researcher to keep abreast of all the developments and changes taking place, and to decide whether to include new material, particularly during the write-up phase. In addition, as I reflect on the research process I would have placed the focus group study earlier on, so that I could have followed up even more comprehensively new avenues or ideas presented through their discussions. In particular, I would have tried to set up a second focus group with Church school secondary teachers to listen to their responses to my preliminary principles. Nevertheless, on a practical level, maintaining the thesis as a largely theoretical piece, which was hermeneutical in nature, enabled me to continue my paid work whilst also undertaking the research.

## **10.2 Embracing a new understanding of religious education**

The title of my thesis, 'A Pedagogy of Embrace', is unusual; it is perhaps even contentious, and unsettling. However, in the last year of writing up my thesis, I became more convinced that this title was for this particular moment. As I write these conclusions there have been three terrorist attacks in UK cities, and the country is dealing the aftermath of the Brexit vote. These attacks often encourage fear, the kind of fear that an embrace seeks to overcome. The Brexit vote has implications for how we consider our understanding of hospitality, and immigration in particular. An 'embrace' welcomes; an embrace loves; and an embrace seeks to understand the other. In an embrace, the other person is understood through physical and emotional connection. A 'Pedagogy of Embrace' is for this moment, as it seeks to overcome fear through real encounter with others.

Therefore, my thesis provides an opportunity for a different way of thinking

about RE in Church of England schools in our rapidly changing world.

RE is understood as a way of embracing the other through creating space, encounter and listening for wisdom together. This RE is not rooted in the phenomenological approaches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which have influenced so many changes in this field (Chapter One), rather this is a new approach established in theology. It provides a theoretical framework for Church of England school RE, which is currently absent (Chapter Two). This theoretical framework refocuses the agenda on why we teach RE and how to teach it effectively, and provides a way forward for Church schools to secure the subject into the future. With a new vision document recently presented to Church School leaders (Church of England, 2016), the moment is right to establish more clearly the purpose and place of RE in Church schools.

As a result of my research, the Church of England could reconsider its public statements about RE (for example, The *Statement of Entitlement*, 2016) and the subject's relationship to the Christian ethos of the school and the vision document in particular. As a Diocesan adviser, I have an opportunity to put forward my proposition in a local context. I can share my research with headteachers, governors, clergy and teachers to explain how RE can be understood within the mission of the Church of England, and how it can be taught effectively based on my three principles. I can evaluate the impact of this, and use these outcomes to put forward proposals at national level suggesting changes to policy documents. An advisory document for all Church of England schools based on the analogy of an embrace would be one possible practical contribution of my research at national level.

My research supports the use of a hermeneutical approach in RE which some of my colleagues have been advocating, in particular Bowie (2016) and Aldridge (2015). As I have explained in Chapter Seven the focus group study, which was part of the hermeneutical process, reflected the three pedagogical principles particularly listening for wisdom. My research therefore makes a contribution to this field of RE, showing that a theology of hospitality can provide principles for pedagogy which are largely hermeneutical in nature. By building on and developing the ideas from within theology (such as Pohl, 1999) and those from within education (such

as Smith, 2009) I have shown how a hermeneutical approach reflects the paradox of the host-guest relationship where the pedagogy is lived out through the teacher's presence. My approach provides a different perspective as it begins from within theology and draws out principles that are specifically applied to RE. For those already engaged in this field of study (for example, Aldridge, 2015; Bowie, 2016), my work provides an alternative starting point that will provide stimulus for future debate around what it means to **be** a teacher of RE and how we understand what we are doing when we teach the subject. These questions are important in an education system where RE can lack currency (Commission on RE: Interim report, 2017, p.4).

This in turn points towards a rethinking of how we understand knowledge in RE, which challenges some of the pedagogical approaches identified in Chapter One. I put forward a notion that knowledge is to be understood in relationship through encounter and collective listening for wisdom. I have proposed that knowledge is not objective, but about engagement with the subject matter. This seeks to release RE from its phenomenological ties of the last 40 years.

My research outlines implications in terms of the classroom environment, preparation of teaching and learning activities, strategies used by teachers in the classroom and the design of the curriculum (Chapter Nine). However, these are only tentative. Some of these aspects would provide good opportunities for further research. For example, the use of lesson study could be used to determine which classroom strategies best enable the creation of space. In my advisory role, I could ask groups of teachers through network meetings and seminars to undertake classroom-based research to try out a range of strategies that would effectively support the principles advocated. These can be evaluated formally and through *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools* (Church of England, 2013) inspection judgements. At the heart of my research was the desire to improve teaching and learning, and the outcomes for pupils. My research has the potential to achieve this through better understanding of the nature of the subject, effective pedagogy and classroom practice. In addition, through collaboration with other diocesan advisers, I am developing a new approach to curriculum design for Church of England schools with funding from the Jerusalem Trust. This project is a pragmatic

response to particular issues relating to imbalance in the RE curriculum in some Church schools. As a pragmatic response, a theoretical framework to underpin this work has not been a priority. My final proposition provides a starting point for creating a framework which would establish any new curriculum design within a well-researched paradigm.

### **10.3 Implications for my own practice**

In my role as a Diocesan adviser I plan to use the analogy of an embrace to explain the place and purpose of RE in Church of England schools with headteachers, governors and classroom teachers. I believe this is the first step in ensuring that the purpose of RE is understood within this specific context. It will help all members of these school communities, including parents, to grasp the aims of RE set out in the *Statement of Entitlement* (Church of England, 2016) within the new vision for education set out by the Church of England (2016). As explained in Chapter Three, visual representations can help us to articulate and imagine ideas which are hard to put into words. The embrace enables the relationship of RE and the Christian mission of the Church of England in a school to be expressed clearly. Yet this analogy also allows each of the principles for pedagogy to be explained.

In addition, although the pedagogical principles were devised for teachers, they can also be applied to my own practice as an adviser. They provide principles for continuing professional development (CPD), which were borne out through the focus group study (Chapter Seven). In my role as an adviser, I can rethink how I create space when running professional development opportunities. I can enable teachers to encounter others, particularly those on the margins or providing alternative perspectives. Lastly, I can promote collaborative thinking and relationships as we listen to each other's stories and seek wisdom together. My own pedagogical practice as an adviser will therefore be informed by a theology of hospitality as I live out my principles with teachers. By embracing my own principles, I will be able to show more effectively how they can be applied in the classroom.

These principles reflect many of the *Standards for teachers' professional development* (Department for Education, 2016) which emphasise working



together, coaching and mentoring models and long-term programmes of CPD which are sustained over time. My proposition puts forward a Christian understanding of these principles through a theology of hospitality, thus the principles for pedagogy could also be regarded as principles for effective CPD provision although this was not an original intention. This provides an opportunity for me to present to the Church of England Education Office a way of understanding professional development within a specifically Christian context.

#### **10.4 Conclusions**

Finally, I return to the words of Volf:

In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become part of me while at the same time I maintain my own identity. By becoming part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace, none remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.

(Volf, 1995, p.203)

Through this research process I have metaphorically opened my own arms to create space for new ideas and welcome in new perspectives. I have encircled many different positions and listened to different views. I have been enriched, and I hope that others will be enriched, too, as a result of reading 'A Pedagogy of Embrace'.

## **Glossary**

Basic Curriculum	This refers to the National Curriculum and religious education and sex and relationships education.
Brexit	A popular term used to refer to the proposed withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2019
CEM	Christian Education Movement
Christology	A branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ
Contact Theory	The Contact Theory hypothesis is that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between people. See for example, Allport, 1954
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
Diocese	A district under the pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church. In this thesis it refers in particular to the Church of England.
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FORASE	Forum on Religious and Spiritual Education, King's College London
LEA	Local Education Authority
LA	Local Authority

National Curriculum	The national curriculum is a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary schools so children learn the same things. It covers what subjects are taught and the standards children should reach in each subject.
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Council of England and Wales
REDCo Project	An international research project which took place between 2006-9 involving universities from eight European countries. The project aimed to establish whether studies of religions in schools could help to promote dialogue and reduce conflict in school and society.
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
SATS	Standard Assessment Tests
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (predecessor of QCA)
SHAP	SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education
SIAMS	Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (Section 48 Inspection)

SPAG	Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar Test
Voluntary Controlled (VC)	There are foundation governors in voluntary controlled schools, but they are a minority. Voluntary controlled schools follow the locally agreed syllabus for RE of the Local Authority in which they are located.
Voluntary Aided (VA)	In a voluntary aided school, a majority of the governing body is made up of foundation governors, who are appointed by the Church with a duty to include maintaining the Church of England character of the school in their overall governance. The voluntary aided school has responsibility for its own RE, which must be based on its Trust Deed.
WRERU	The Warwick Religions and Education Unit

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York, S., 2002. *The Holy Intimacy of Strangers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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## **Appendix 1: List of visual images used for active contemplation**

Ackland, M., 1993. *The Last Supper*. [Painting] (Melbourne, Australia)

Available at:

<http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=775&lang=en&action=show>

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<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio-the-supper-at-emmaus> [Accessed 7 April 2014].

Rublev, A., c.1410. *Holy Trinity*. [Painting] (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery)

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Velazquez, D., c.1618. *Kitchen Maid with the Supper of Emmaus*.

[Painting] (Ireland, National Gallery of Dublin) Available at:

<https://www.nationalgallery.ie/kitchen-maid-supper-emmaus-diego-velazquez> [Accessed 7 April 2014].

In addition, I used personal photographs of the Cloisters of San Giovanni in Laterno, Rome 2016.

## **Appendix 2: Letter to Diocesan Director of Education, Mr. Andy Mash**

Dear Andy Mash,

**Title: Could a Christian theology of hospitality provide a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools?**

I am writing to you about the research I am conducting as part of my doctorate (PhD) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). I am interested in testing and developing my hypothesis on a new approach to teaching religious education with teachers in Church of England schools and academies in the Diocese of Norwich. I am therefore writing to ask permission to approach schools in this Diocese and to use the Diocesan database to contact potential participants. I attach an information sheet about the research.

Please could you return the consent slip below to me, if you are willing to help me in this way.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact me on: [kathryn.h.wright@uea.ac.uk](mailto:kathryn.h.wright@uea.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about the research please contact my supervisor: Dr. Jacqueline Watson [jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Wright

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### **Consent from Andy Mash**

**Title: Could a Christian theology of hospitality provide a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools?**

I do/do not\* give my consent for Diocese of Norwich Church Schools to be approached to participate in the above research.

I do/do not\* give my consent for the Diocesan database to be used to contact schools.

\* delete as appropriate

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



### **Appendix 3: Focus group participant invitation letter and information**

30th June 2014

Dear Colleague,

#### **Could a Christian theology of hospitality provide a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools?**

I am writing to you about the research I am conducting as part of my doctorate (PhD) at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

I am interested in testing and developing my hypothesis on a new approach to teaching religious education with teachers in Church of England schools and academies in the Diocese of Norwich. I am therefore planning to set up a focus group to discuss ideas and take part in workshop style activities to help inform my thinking on pedagogy.

It would be very helpful if you could take part in my research. Please read the information sheet attached to this letter and, if you are willing to take part in this study, please sign and return the consent form enclosed.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact me on: [kathryn.H.wright@uea.ac.uk](mailto:kathryn.H.wright@uea.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about the research please contact my supervisor: Dr. Jacqueline Watson [jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Wright

## **INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Could a Christian theology of hospitality provide a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools?**

**Researcher:** Mrs. Kathryn Wright

**Supervisor:** Dr. Jacqueline Watson

I would like to invite you to take part in my research and I need your signed consent if you agree to participate. Before you decide, you need to know why I am doing this research and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully to help you decide whether or not to take part. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is this study about?**

I am trying to find out if some of the Christian ideas about hospitality are helpful when approaching the teaching of RE in Church schools.

#### **How will you be involved?**

I will host a focus group (maximum 10 participants) that will last approximately 2 hours on 2-3 occasions between September 2014-January 2015. These would most likely take place during the school day e.g. 1-3pm or 2-4pm. I will initiate discussion around my current hypothesis and gather the group's views on this. I will use some workshop style activities (e.g. ranking cards, creating mindmaps) to support the creative thinking process. The sessions will be recorded on a voice recorder so that transcripts can be made. In addition, some photographs of workshop outcomes such as post it notes or diagrammatic work (but not participants themselves) may be made. As the focus group will probably take place during school time, I am asking for you to get the permission of your head teacher to take part.

As the focus group may provide some continuing professional development to participants, a certificate of participation will be given to all those who take part in the group. However, it should be noted that the primary aim of the focus group is to develop a hypothesis as part of my research and not to provide CPD for teachers.

The hypothesis and final thesis will remain my intellectual property as the researcher.

**Who will have the access to the research information (data)?**

Data management will follow the 1988 Data Protection Act. I will not keep information about you that could identify you to someone else. All the names of the individuals taking part in the research and the school(s) will be anonymised to preserve confidentiality. The data will be stored safely and will be destroyed when my project is completed. The data will only be used for my work and will only be seen by myself, my supervisor, and those who mark my work.

Members of the focus group will have an option to be named under acknowledgements in the thesis. You must make this clear on the consent form if you wish for your name to be used in this way. If all participants agree to being named then they will be published, if not then no names will appear.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The research study has been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

**Who do I speak to if problems arise?**

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

[kathryn.h.wright@uea.ac.uk](mailto:kathryn.h.wright@uea.ac.uk)

or by post at:

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:

Dr. Jacqueline Watson

[jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:jacqueline.watson@uea.ac.uk)

If you have any complaints about the research, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Dr Nalini Boodhoo, at [n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk](mailto:n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk).

**OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?**

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it to me via email. Please keep the letter, information sheet and your own copy of the consent form for your information.

**Can you change your mind?**

Yes. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

**Thank you very much for your time.**

#### Appendix 4: Focus group consent form

Please return a copy of this to Kathryn Wright via email and keep a copy for your records along with the initial letter and information sheet.

#### Could a Christian theology of hospitality provide a theoretical framework for RE pedagogy in Church of England schools?

I have read the information about the study. **Yes/No** (*please delete as appropriate*)

I am willing to take part in the study. **Yes/No**

I have the permission of my headteacher to take part in this study **Yes/No**

I am happy for my name to appear in a list of acknowledgements in the thesis. **Yes/No** (*Note: If all participants agree names will appear, if not, then no names will be published*)

I am willing to be voice recorded as part of the study. **Yes/No**

I am willing for photographs to be taken of workshop outcomes e.g. writing, and drawing and understand that this will **not** include photographs of people **Yes/No**

Your Name: .....

Your Signature: .....

Signature of your headteacher: .....

Date: .....

## **Appendix 5: Focus group cards relating to pedagogy used by teachers**

Which pedagogies and why?

Which approaches do you use? Give out cards (see left hand column, these cards were cut up and laminated) with key pedagogies as outlined in Chapter 1 of my thesis.

Why do you use these approaches?

What the positive and negative benefits of using these approaches in your setting?

Which approaches do you think works best in a church school? Why?

What do they think is the underlying purpose of each approach? Teachers were then given the cards in the right-hand column to match up with the pedagogies. The 'answers' were then given, and this opened to further discussion.

1. Children explore objectively key religious vocabulary, what people believe and how they express these beliefs in practice. Children may use artefacts and other resources which help them learn about religion.	1. RE is about the realities of religions and beliefs – their myths, doctrines, rituals, values. These are phenomena which can and should be studied with an attempt at objectivity and empathy in order to understand the religion as it really is in itself. Phenomenology
2. Children are encouraged to explore different ways of seeing, to become self-aware and engage with spirituality. Children take part in activities in RE which nurture their spirituality.	2. RE is primarily about spiritual development and rooted in psychology. Experiential
3. Children unpack a religious concept and explore what it means to be a believer in a particular faith and relate this to their own lives. The focus is on encouraging empathy and reflecting and evaluating beliefs in order to shape attitude and behaviour.	3. RE is about understanding the key concepts of religion and belief and the meaning of these for believers. The approach is a hermeneutical one. Concept Cracking
4. Children explore complex issues of truth by focusing on a key enquiry question. They relate this to their own lives and examine different approaches to truth, evaluating and reflecting on them to draw their own conclusions.	4. RE is about a quest for truth. RE is never neutral or value free so must be critical and enquiring in its approach. The aim of RE is to empower pupils to live good lives. Critical Realist
5. Children engage with religious content which leads to personal development. Children explore religious beliefs and practices and then relate this to themselves.	5. RE is about helping children mature in relation to their own pattern of belief and behaviour, through exploring religions, beliefs and practices and related human experience. Personal development is a primary aim of RE. Human Development.

6. Children engage with a component of religion e.g. song, prayer, artefact and then progress to a more complex understanding through exploration, contextualisation (putting it in its context) and reflection.	6. RE is about the development of the child with the means being the study of religion. Gift of the Child.
7. Children engage with religion as lived human experience rather than as 'isms'. Children relate to a way of life that is different from their own, by interacting with what real people from religious traditions actually say and do (reflexivity); helping them to connect insights from those traditions with their own personal knowledge and experience (edification).	7. RE is about coming to understand how religious people and religious groups within the same religious tradition interpret and express their understanding of faith in a variety of way. It is about understanding religion 'from the inside'. Interpretive
8. Children engage in dialogue about religion and belief and construct their own meaning. The focus is on the skill of interpreting religion and belief in relation to their own experience and that of others.	8. Meaning is at the heart of education, so RE is about existential enquiry. RE is about constructing meaning, not about a quest for truth. Constructivist
9. Children learn about Christianity and develop their own understanding of what it means to be a Christian within the Anglican tradition.	9. RE is a way to hand on the truths and rituals of a tradition to the new generation – a safe space for the young to explore and develop their religious identity in the light of the community's tradition. Faith Nurture

## **Appendix 6: Focus group statements about RE in a Church of England context**

These two statements (A and B) were used with teachers. Half the focus group were given one to begin with, and then they swopped over. I asked them whether their views have changed after being given the second set.

### **A**

**The following statements have been applied to Church of England schools' religious education.**

**What do they suggest the aim of religious education might be?**

**How far do you agree with these aims?**

*'the Church at national, diocesan and local level is called to work towards every child and young person having a life enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ'*

*Consistent with this understanding of mission, church schools put spiritual development at the heart of the curriculum. All members of the school community should experience Christianity through the life of the schools, as well as through the taught curriculum.*

### **B**

**The following statements have been applied to Church of England schools' religious education.**

**What do they suggest the aim of religious education might be?**

**How far do you agree with these aims?**

*To enable pupils to encounter Christianity as the religion that shaped British culture and heritage and influences the lives of millions of people today*



*To enable pupils to learn about the other major religions, their impact on culture and politics, art and history, and on the lives of their adherents*

*To develop understanding of religious faith as the search for and expression of truth*

*To contribute to the development of pupils' own spiritual / philosophical convictions, exploring and enriching their own faith and beliefs*

## **Appendix 7: List of images used with the focus group including their active contemplations**

The images were presented for active contemplation without their titles or any explanation. The teachers wrote their ideas around the edge of each image and then talked about them. The records below are what they wrote about each image, the discussions were recorded and transcribed.

### **Image 1: The Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus by Diego Velázquez, c.1618 [Painting] (Ireland, National Gallery of Dublin)**

Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/kitchen-maid-supper-emmaus-diego-velazquez>

Teacher A: service to others, outpouring of self, nothing left materially or energy. She looks exhausted.

Teacher B: Immediate thought is lack of hospitality as there is nothing there it shares, or has she just been hospitable to people in the background? There is a chance in everyday/situations to be hospitable. She's alone.

Teacher D - polishing the best china after a meal? Service to others enabling others to feel good and talk.

### **Image 2: Southern Hospitality by Paul Hill, 2010 [Sculpture] (Wilmington, North Carolina)** Available at: <http://metal-artist-sculptor.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/featured-artist-paul-hill.html>

Teacher A: A venus fly trap? why? Light shining in the darkness, standing proud with everyday life milling around it...

Teacher B: yellow-younger person looking up at older person, blue-for wisdom. Space to think, share, communicate even though the surroundings may not facilitate this. Taking timeout to have 'a space'.

Teacher D: special, stands out, very different, have to look and puzzle, makes me curious, not comfortable, a bit challenging

**Image 3: Holy Trinity or The Hospitality of Abraham by Andrei Rublev  
C.1410 [Painting] (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery)** Available at:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg>

Teacher A: The trinity, 3 figures, 3 in 1, one cup

Teacher B: All equal, or person with open wings more favoured?

Teacher D: Trinity? Angels? Who is providing the hospitality for whom?

**Image 4: The Last Supper by Margaret Ackland, 1993, [Painting]  
(Melbourne, Australia)** Available at:

<http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=775&lang=en&action=show>

Teacher A: Listening for wisdom, people gathered for a common purpose

Teacher B: Special occasion, many people gathered, sharing exciting, all included

Teacher D: Convivial, round table, sharing wine all together together

**Image 5: The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah by Cretan School  
(unknown artist) c. 1700 [Painting] (location unknown)** Available at:

<http://www.mystudios.com/artgallery/C/Cretan-School/The-Hospitality-of-Abraham-and-Sarah.html>

Teacher A: Creating space- arms outstretched, welcoming all kinds to be at one table

Teacher B: Typical image of welcoming people, everyone able to share and take part

Teacher D: Sharing round table, equality

My last job, I was just a teacher, it was a part time teaching job, so I wasn't going in a leadership role, yet I was still asked something along those lines in our interview...

It is quite interesting in our school, we have a relatively new member of staff who is a Muslim, which is actually quite helpful. We do have a significant number of Muslim children, so it was quite interesting when I did a lesson on Christianity recently, she was in the lesson, and I don't know... I hadn't had the opportunity to speak to her before hand as I didn't know she would be in there, but I did wonder (perhaps its a conversation I need to have afterwards)... but I did wonder about how she felt, about what I was saying to the children, it added a different dynamic. So as you were saying we can't assume that anybody believes what they are putting across, but likewise if we are teaching about a different faith, obviously we wouldn't start the conversation with 'I don't actually believe this but we would still try to put forward the beliefs of that particular religion. There are interesting points here about personal views and how one teaches RE, and how one represents religion and beliefs... if one includes Christ there might be a danger that a Christianised view of a religion or belief is presented, rather than it being a genuine and authentic encounter with the 'view from the inside'. Using the tourist analogy it would be like an English tour guide showing you the key sites in Bangkok - they would bring an Anglicised view of the sites into their description, where as a Thai would explain the significance for him/her as a native...

We became a church school, we weren't a church school to start with, so there are a significant number of colleagues who have different beliefs, or no beliefs or no desire to share their Christian faith if they have one. And, to make sure everyone is teaching good quality RE, and quite a lot of people who didn't have beliefs didn't want to teach RE, and would give it to someone else, we have ensured that everybody is teaching their own RE. I've sold it as a rigorous, humanities subject that has to be taught in depth, and I've said to them, you are not going to pray or do Buddhist meditation, and they understand, they could see the distinction between teaching the RE and really well and their own personal beliefs and the way we have other things within the school and that sits much more comfortably with them. The praying 3 times a day in school does not sit so comfortably with everyone, but they can see it as a way of calming the children down. So they say Lord's prayer as a way of calming the children down.

Teresa makes a good point that being clear about purpose is key to successful RE in schools... would including the idea of Endorsing Christ put teachers off... is it too exclusive?

KW: So you said you tried hard to ensure RE was seen as a rigorous academic subject, and in my work that is something I'm focusing on... do these principles suggest something that isn't a rigorous academic subject, do they suggest something else?

I think that maybe creating space and listening for wisdom because they seem to be initially, an ideas, a thoughts and ideas kind of thing, then maybe that does seem less academically rigorous than maths and literacy kind of set up...

So I need to think about how I couch these in a way that does not imply this...

I would agree with that, I'm also thinking that our other academic subjects could do with sitting within something like this, to give them that real sense of purpose, not just learning because they want to improve their ability in that subject, but actually thinking about the purpose of what they learn...

No I think, that these two are needed for a rigorous academic subject (creating space, and listening for wisdom), we are really pushing the in-depth questioning and thinking skills, and the metacognition and reflecting on our learning, these are part of every lesson I think SO Teresa see them differently, so it is how I phrase it that is key... I like Teresa's idea that we NEED these two aspects to ensure academic rigour... that is a really interesting take on the whole thing!

KW: What do you think....?

I would say that all of those are needed, not necessarily the Christ bit, but in every subject right from reception all the way up through the school, lots have been done on the different levels of questioning and getting them to think more deeply on things, although RE, seems to do it more, but I'm starting to use it in other subjects as well, as it creates independent thinkers that are not being told to do things all the time, so I think that I'd find and hoping within all the curriculum that would be the ideal

KW: So are you suggesting these principles can be applied to any curriculum subject?

All: Yes